

The Politics of a Republican Anti-  
Racism in Contemporary France:  
An Ethnographic Study of the  
Anti-Racist Association  
SOS-Racisme

Robert Alexander Gibb

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# Abstract

Through a detailed study of the anti-racist association SOS-Racisme, this thesis examines the relationship between party politics, anti-racism and republicanism in contemporary France. It is based on fieldwork conducted in Paris over an eighteen-month period (1993-1994), involving long-term participant observation, semi-structured interviewing and archival research. Two principal themes are explored: (1) how republican ideologies and institutions have played a crucial part in determining both the form and content of SOS-Racisme's opposition to racism; and (2) how the collective identity of the association itself, as a part of a broader anti-racist movement and in relation to the political process, has been (re-)negotiated over time by its members, at both a local and a national level. It is argued that SOS-Racisme's use of a 'republican' concept of integration and its relationship to the sphere of party politics remain problematic and the implications of this for the future efficacy of its action are discussed.

Declaration: The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.



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NB: Notes are placed at the end of each chapter. Names of grassroots activists are pseudonyms. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are my own. In the case of citations of a sentence or more in length the English translation has been placed in the main body of the text, with the original French contained in a footnote.

# Glossary

CAIF	Conseil des associations immigrées en France
CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail
CGT	Confédération générale du travail
CIMADE	Comité inter-mouvements auprès des évacués
CNCDP	Comité national contre la double peine
COSEF	Collectif syndical des étudiants de France
FIDL	Fédération indépendante et démocratique lycéenne
FN	Front national
GISTI	Groupe d'information et de soutien des travailleurs immigrés
GS	Gauche socialiste
HLM	Habitation à loyer modéré
LCR	Ligue communiste révolutionnaire
LDH	Ligue des droits de l'homme
LICRA	Ligue internationale contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme
LO	Lutte ouvrière
MAS	Mouvement d'action syndicale
MJS	Mouvement des jeunes socialistes
MRAP	Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples
MRG	Mouvement des radicaux de gauche
NES	Nouvelle école socialiste
OBU	Organisation des banlieues unies
PCF	Parti communiste français
PCI	Parti communiste internationaliste
PS	Parti socialiste
QS	Questions socialistes
REFLEX	Réseau d'études de formation et de liaison contre l'extrême droite
RPR	Rassemblement pour la République
SCALP	Sections carrément anti-Le Pen
UDF	Union pour la démocratie française
UEJF	Union des étudiants juifs de France
UNEF-ID	Union nationale des étudiants de France-Indépendante et démocratique
UNEF-SE	Union nationale des étudiants de France-Solidarité étudiante
UNEF-US	Union nationale des étudiants de France-Unité syndicale

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# Chapter 1

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## Introduction

In December 1994 the French anti-racist association SOS-Racisme marked the tenth anniversary of its founding by organising a large 'birthday party' for its supporters at the Elysée-Montmartre, a popular concert venue in the heart of Paris. The event was held in the main hall, with a podium, microphone and projection screen on a raised stage, and fifty or so candle-lit tables arranged in the floor space immediately below. A brightly-coloured banner bearing the slogan 'The Ten Years of SOS' stretched across the wall at the back of the stage.

At the opposite end of the hall there was standing-room and a makeshift bar. As the final preparations were made on the stage and people started to take their places at the tables, I stood chatting to some of the grassroots activists I had come to know over the previous eighteen months. Every so often a celebrity from the world of politics, the arts or show business would pass in front of us, and I would be asked: 'Do you know who that was?' I would then be informed of the person's identity and the role they had played in either the association's creation or its subsequent development.

The initial part of the evening consisted of a retracing of SOS-Racisme's history through a series of mini-interviews with its founder-members and

celebrity sponsors (*parrains*). These were interspersed with clips from televised interviews and footage from the demonstrations and massive pop concerts which the association organised throughout the second half of the 1980s. Then the stage was cleared and a table was set up on which a huge birthday cake was placed. Peering over the heads of the rows of people standing in front of me I was just able to see a small, frail-looking old man being helped onto the stage by SOS-Racisme's president, Fodé Sylla. He walked slowly over to the cake and proceeded to cut it. After turning briefly to face the assembled guests, he disappeared off into the wings as the hall echoed with the sound of rapturous applause, cheering and whistling. 'It's Mitterrand! Can you see?' shouted the activists beside me, smiling and clapping enthusiastically. The applause lasted for several minutes while people jumped up to get a better view of the stage and exchanged excited comments with their neighbours.

After Mitterrand's departure, the tables and chairs in front of the stage were cleared away, as the final part of the evening was to be given over to a concert. As this was going on, the activists I knew from the local committee I myself had joined discussed the significance of Mitterrand's appearance and of the event as a whole. Although the evening was undoubtedly a celebration of SOS-Racisme, several of the activists standing with me also detected a more sombre note. They likened the evocation of the association's history, and the presence of so many of the members and celebrities who had played an active role in its development, to a funeral where everyone had come to pay their last respects. It was, they remarked, as if SOS-Racisme had outlived its purpose and was in the process of being 'buried (*enterrée*)' before our eyes.

This brief account of an event occurring at the end of my fieldwork in Paris highlights a number of the key issues I will address in detail in the chapters which follow. The first of these is the nature of the relationship between SOS-Racisme, as an anti-racist association, and political parties, particularly but not exclusively those on the Left. As well as Mitterrand, who at the time was still President of the Republic, several prominent Socialist (PS) and Communist (PCF) Party politicians, including notably Jack Lang, Lionel Jospin and Robert Hue, were present that December evening at the Elysée-Montmartre. What role, if any, did such figures play in SOS-Racisme's creation and subsequent development? On the other hand, what impact has SOS-Racisme had on the political process in France since the mid-1980s? How, finally, have national-level and grassroots activists conceived the link between anti-racism and political activism more generally? This is a first set of questions which the thesis will be concerned to answer.

A second issue which emerged clearly in the exchanges between grassroots activists was the future of SOS-Racisme as part of the broader French anti-racist movement. As I explain more fully in Part II, the past decade has witnessed an important debate in France, involving both scholars and activists, about the strengths and weaknesses of various forms of anti-racism. SOS-Racisme has frequently been a focal point, either explicit or implicit, of these arguments. It has been suggested, for example, that the association lacked a coherent strategy to prevent the continuous expansion of the far-right National Front (FN) party in the 1980s. Alternatively, critics have argued that SOS-Racisme incarnated a type of 'show business' or media-oriented anti-racism which was ineffectual or even counterproductive in the struggle against racism. The association's activists, on the other hand, have consistently denied these charges and claimed instead that one of SOS-



Racisme's merits has been to change the terms of political debate away from 'assimilationism' towards a purportedly more progressive notion of 'integration'.

A third theme, which was highlighted by many of the interview clips shown during the evening, is that of the relationship between anti-racism and republicanism. Indeed, one of the aims of the present thesis is to explore the ways in which references to 'republican values' and 'the republican tradition' have framed SOS-Racisme's interventions on a range of different subjects. As Cathie Lloyd has stated, 'the implications especially for the French anti-racist left of republicanism, secularism, and universalism are very particular to France' (Lloyd 1991: 67), and I intend to outline and discuss these through a detailed analysis of SOS-Racisme's public actions and internal debates during 1993-94. The organisation's approach has been described as 'a kind of republican sense of citizenship (*une sorte de civisme républicain*)' (Wihtol de Wenden 1997: 60), and I will examine the extent to which this is an appropriate characterisation. In the process, I will consider how members of SOS-Racisme interpreted and articulated the three key notions mentioned by Lloyd – republicanism, secularism and universalism – in the context of a range of campaigns and debates.

Through a detailed study of the anti-racist organisation SOS-Racisme, then, this thesis seeks to explore the relationship between party politics, anti-racism and republicanism in contemporary France. The fieldwork on which it is based was carried out over a period of eighteen months (July 1993-December 1994) as a member of a Parisian committee of SOS-Racisme. During this time, the organisation was engaged in campaigns against a reform of the constitutional right to asylum, and the Pasqua-Méhaignerie laws on entry and residence rights, identity checks and access to French

nationality, introduced by the centre-right following their victory in the 1993 parliamentary elections (see, in particular, Chapter 9). The mobilisation organised by SOS-Racisme and other groups against these measures was the crucial first stage in a process which was to culminate four years later in the 1997 Weil reports and subsequent Socialist legislation on foreigners' rights (see Weil 1997; *Journal Officiel de la République Française* 1998; Hollifield 1999). This thesis examines the strategic and ideological debates which characterised the early attempts by SOS-Racisme and others to build an oppositional movement against the Pasqua-Méhaignerie laws.

In this introductory chapter, I lay the foundations for what follows in three specific ways. Firstly, I situate my work in relation to the broader fields of the anthropology of France, urban anthropology, and the anthropology of 'race' and racism. These are the three main areas of anthropological inquiry to which the present thesis makes a contribution. Secondly, I review recent debates about the republican tradition in France and about the existence of a specifically 'republican' model of national integration. This prepares the ground for the argument I develop in subsequent chapters that SOS-Racisme has played a key role in the articulation and promotion of the idea of a distinctively republican model of integrating foreigners into the nation-state. Finally, I present a brief chronological account of SOS-Racisme's development from its creation in 1984 up until the summer of 1993 when I started fieldwork. In so doing, my intention is to highlight the key moments in SOS-Racisme's history which are discussed in more detail later in the thesis. (An overview of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure and its links with other organisations is provided in the next chapter.) The present chapter concludes with a brief summary of the thesis as a whole.

## Anthropology, Anti-Racism and Politics in Urban France

The anthropology of France has developed in important new directions over the past twenty-five years. In general terms, there has been a gradual move away from an anthropology of France's rural communities, closely linked to museology and a concern with traditional ways of life threatened by economic modernisation, towards 'an anthropology of the present (*une ethnologie du présent*)' of French society with its predominantly urban and industrial characteristics (Althabe 1992; Augé 1994: 155-175). Until the late 1970s, in fact, both French and foreign anthropologists tended to choose only relatively isolated, rural villages or small market towns as their field sites and to focus on a correspondingly narrow range of themes, such as traditional farming and craft techniques, kinship, local fêtes and ceremonies, and story-telling (Bromberger 1997: 294; Delamont 1995: 213-5). Since then, attention has progressively shifted to aspects of modern, urban life and to the central institutions of contemporary French society. This has resulted in anthropological studies of a diverse range of themes and social settings, from football matches (Bromberger 1992) and factories (Moulinié 1993), to the prestigious *grandes écoles* (Bellier 1992) and even the National Assembly (Abéles 2000).<sup>1</sup>

During this period, the city has become the 'locus' and, to a lesser extent, the specific 'focus' (Hannerz 1980: 3) of much anthropological research in France. Initially, anthropologists carried out research mainly in particular areas or neighbourhoods of large towns and cities (e.g. Selim 1982) or about 'excluded' or disadvantaged sections of the urban population such as minority ethnic groups and young people living in peripheral housing estates (see Althabe 1992: 250; 1998a and b).<sup>2</sup> Subsequent anthropological research in French cities has, however, also begun to explore more dispersed

and varied social networks, as well as a wider range of social *milieux*, including that of the bourgeoisie (e.g. Le Wita 1988).

The increasing number of anthropologists carrying out studies both *in* and *of* Paris is indicative of this trend towards more urban-based research. In the early 1980s, one commentator noted that Paris had been 'almost deserted (*quasi déserté*)' by anthropologists because of the methodological difficulties associated with conducting ethnographic fieldwork there (Le Wita 1982: 197. Cf. Loux 1983).<sup>3</sup> Over the past twenty years, in contrast, more and more anthropologists have undertaken research not only in the Parisian suburbs (e.g. Brisebarre 1993; Benveniste 1999; Fainzang 1988) but also in some of the most well-known sites of central Paris such as the metro (Augé 1986; 1996), the Luxembourg Gardens (Augé 1985) and the Père-Lachaise cemetery (Pétonnet 1982), as well as in many other settings, ranging from the office of a large company (Guigo 1991) to cafés (Conord 2000) and gay bars (Busscher 2000). In so doing, they have investigated diverse types of Paris-based social network, from associations of entomologists (Delaporte 1986) to those of African women (Quiminal 1998, 2000).

The present thesis is intended as a contribution to this 'new anthropology (*nouvelle ethnologie*)' of contemporary France (Copans 1996: 103). As a detailed, ethnographic study of the activities of the prominent anti-racist association SOS-Racisme in Paris over an eighteen-month period (1993-94), it has two particular aims in this respect. Firstly, it seeks to build on and extend recent anthropological work on French politics. Over the past fifteen years, Marc Abélès and a number of other political anthropologists have produced a series of fascinating analyses of the ritual and symbolic aspects of political representation and party competition in France.<sup>4</sup> The role of anti-racist and other social movements in the political process, however, has

received far less attention. One of my goals is, therefore, to begin to address this gap in the existing literature. Secondly, the thesis attempts to further the development of an anthropology of urban France, and, in particular, of Paris. Although anti-racist activism in France is not a specifically Parisian or even urban phenomenon, the thesis highlights the crucial ways in which the action of one of SOS-Racisme's neighbourhood committees was partially determined by its location in the French capital, as well as by national political processes which affected the association as a whole. In this sense, the city became, in the terms of Hannerz's distinction, a 'focus' and not simply the 'locus' of the research (see Chapter 2).

This thesis is not only a contribution to the anthropology of politics in contemporary, urban France, however. It also contributes to the expanding anthropological literature on racism and anti-racism. The study of 'race' and racism has, of course, long occupied a prominent place within the discipline: in American anthropology, it can be traced back to Boas and his students (Harrison 1995: 52-3); in Britain, the anthropologists of the so-called Manchester School were concerned with 'tribalism' and ethnicity from the 1950s onwards (see Banks 1996: 24-39); and interest in the subject also grew among French anthropologists in the immediate post-war period (see, for example, Lévi-Strauss 1952). Nevertheless, as a number of commentators have noted, the subsequent rise of a social constructionist model of ethnicity, within British anthropology in particular, tended to direct attention away from 'race' and questions of power and discrimination (Jenkins 1997: 48; Banks 1996: 97-120). It is only in the last decade, in fact, that the discipline (on both sides of the Atlantic) has emerged from 'a period of relative indifference and inattention to matters of race and racism' and sought to



develop a more critical analysis of such issues (Harrison 1999: 609. See also Fassin, Morice and Quiminal 1997).

The current resurgence of interest in 'race' and racism within anthropology has led to a re-examination of the different ways in which the discipline itself has historically been involved not only in the construction of 'racial' differences but also in challenging racial typologies and criticising racism (Shanklin 2000). This attempt to recover 'anthropology's multiple traditions of anti-racism' (Harrison 1995: 47) is extremely important. However, it has to date been accompanied by relatively few anthropological studies of contemporary, *non*-scientific types of anti-racism. As recent reviews of the literature have revealed, anthropologists have devoted significantly more attention to ideas of 'race' and structures of 'racial' inequality than to anti-racist movements and everyday forms of resistance to racism (Harrison 1995, 1999).<sup>5</sup> A similar 'imbalance' exists in sociological, historical and geographical research on racism and anti-racism (Bonnett 2000: 2).

The under-developed nature of social scientific research on anti-racism is surprising, as the struggle against racism has been the focus of considerable, and at times acrimonious, public discussion in the US, Britain and France, especially in the post-war period. Nonetheless, academic research on the subject remains relatively scarce. Indeed, in their review of (primarily anglophone and sociological) work on anti-racism, John Solomos and Les Back have noted that:

this is an issue on which there is little research, either on historical trends or contemporary processes. It is largely as a result of the lack of research that much of the public discussion about anti-racism remains at the level of rhetoric and abstract generalisations. Without a detailed analysis of the role of anti-racism in contemporary societies, however, we shall not be able to understand the changing dynamics of racial

ideologies and political mobilisations or the possibilities for defeating racist movements [...]. (Solomos and Back 1996: 103)<sup>6</sup>

Researchers in Britain have, admittedly, examined 'municipal anti-racism' in some detail (see Ball and Solomos 1990; Braham, Rattansi and Skellington 1992; Gilroy 1987: 136-48), but there have been surprisingly few studies of individual anti-racist organisations.<sup>7</sup> In France, too, as Jan Willem Duyvendak has noted, scholarly works on the anti-racist movement are 'not legion', although accounts written by activists themselves are fairly numerous (Duyvendak 1994: 224n21).<sup>8</sup> In fact, with a few exceptions, notably Colette Guillaumin (1995), French sociologists (and anthropologists) have until quite recently devoted little attention to the topics of racism and anti-racism (see Crowley 1992: 167).<sup>9</sup> The most important work in this area has tended instead to be produced by political philosophers, such as Pierre-André Taguieff (1990a, 1995, 1997) and Tzvetan Todorov (1993), who have traced the historical development of racist and anti-racist ideologies in the modern period.

A central argument of this thesis, however, is that the development of a more sociological (in the broadest sense) perspective on the anti-racist movement in France is an important task if public and academic debate there, as in Britain, is to move beyond the general level on which it has frequently been conducted. As I discuss in Part II, the philosophical critiques of anti-racism advanced by Taguieff and others are of undoubted importance, but too often they have presented a one-dimensional, outdated or even caricatured image of the anti-racist movement. In particular, critics such as Taguieff have tended to exaggerate the homogeneity of 'anti-racism' in contemporary France and, crucially, to deny the capacity for self-analysis and change of its constituent elements. In contrast, this ethnographic study

of SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist campaigning organisation will seek to emphasise the different ways in which the association is effectively 'in movement'. Most obviously, the thesis will be concerned to situate SOS-Racisme in the context of a broader anti-racist movement composed of a range of other actors with both similar and conflicting political orientations and strategies. However, it will also explore the various ways in which SOS-Racisme itself has evolved since its creation in 1984, notably as a result of changes in the association's leadership and in the wider socio-political environment. In so doing, it will aim to offer a more nuanced and contextualised account of SOS-Racisme's role within the contemporary French anti-racist movement than those which have been published hitherto.

This section has introduced the three main areas of anthropological research – urban France, French politics, and 'race' and racism – to which the present thesis seeks to make a contribution. In the remainder of the chapter, I turn from these anthropological debates to consider aspects of the wider intellectual and historical context in France. Arguments about the nature and contemporary importance of republicanism are a key component of this and form the subject of the next section.

## The Republican Tradition and 'Model' of Integration

Political traditions play an important part in shaping the form and content of contemporary politics. Indeed, as the French historian Raoul Girardet (1987: 13) has observed, modern political traditions have 'a double role' which is comparable to that of foundation myths in ancient societies. On the one hand, they provide an explanation of the present and its concerns by showing how these are rooted in (or, for that matter, depart from) the values,



principles and modes of action of previous generations. On the other, individuals and groups use political traditions to make sense of their own place in society and in the historical process. Invoking a political tradition can, for example, be a powerful way for a given group to claim historical legitimacy for its political strategy or collective identity (Girardet 1987: 11, 1986: 15-24; Hazareesingh 1994: 12-27).

One of the most important political traditions in France over the past two hundred years has been republicanism. The political culture and core institutions of contemporary French society continue to bear its distinctive hallmark. In the chapters which follow, I examine the influence of this 'republican tradition' on anti-racist arguments and practices in the 1980s and 1990s. I assess the impact of republican institutions on the form of anti-racism promoted by SOS-Racisme (Chapters 7-8), and also explore the various ways in which the association has itself invoked republican ideology ('republican values') when intervening on key issues (Chapters 9-10). The present section introduces the wider context for these chapters by providing an historical overview of 'the republican tradition' and reviewing recent debates about the 'republican model of integration'.

The history of republicanism as a political tradition in France has been marked since the 1789 Revolution by a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the search for unity and indivisibility, and, on the other, the plurality of forms in which this aspiration has manifested itself (Ozouf 1998: 1076; Nicolet 1994: 15). As Jean Petot has written, the republican tradition is 'both unitary and divided by divergent interpretations, faithful to its origins and variable, reflected in ideas, political behaviour and juridical texts' (Petot 1989: 79).<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of the Third Republic (1870-1940), to take just one example, Radical and Opportunist republicans shared a commitment to

the founding principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, but defined and ranked these in quite different ways (see Hazareesingh 1994: 80-81). Historical scholarship has in fact revealed republicanism to be 'an extremely elastic political concept [...] riven with ambiguities and internal contradictions' (Hazareesingh 1994: 66). For this reason, a number of recent authors have emphasised the importance of distinguishing between different 'shades' (Jenkins 1990: 81) or even 'subcultures' (Hazareesingh 1998: 19) of republicanism, and of referring to 'republican doctrines' in the plural (Nicolet 1994: 29).

Moreover, as Petot indicates in the passage quoted above, republicanism in France is not only an ideology or set of values; it is also institutionalised in the political, juridical and constitutional systems. The texts of the Constitution and the workings of the Constitutional Court, the structure of the party system and the nature of institutions such as the secular state school (*école laïque*) are all important contemporary expressions of French republicanism. The republican tradition is, in short, 'an institutional reality' as well as a body of doctrines (Nicolet 1994: 30; Agulhon 1993: 1). In Chapters 9-10, I examine the relationship between these two layers of republicanism (the ideological and the institutional) through an analysis of SOS-Racisme's interventions in debates about Constitutional reform and the secularism of state schools.

A further distinction traditionally drawn by historians is that between the 'revolutionary' (or 'classical') and 'modern' phases of French republicanism (see Hazareesingh 1998: 233). The first of these covers the 1789 Revolution and its aftermath; the second, usually assumed to begin with the proclamation of the Third Republic in 1870, witnessed the consolidation of the nation-state in France (Hobsbawm 1983b; Rosanvallon 1990; Weber 1976)

and the emergence of modern democratic institutions (Nora 1997a; Nicolet 1994: 38-40).<sup>11</sup> It was during this latter period that the idea of 'the republican tradition (*la tradition républicaine*)' became established. As Odile Rudelle (1987: 32) has explained, such a notion would have been literally unthinkable for most of the nineteenth century. The hundred years which followed the events of 1789 were characterised instead by ongoing political and ideological conflict between, on the one hand, supporters of a new Republican order and, on the other, defenders of the *ancien régime* and traditional values. In fact, the first public 'synthesis' of these apparently antagonistic political concepts, Republic and Tradition, occurred only in 1900, in the context of the Dreyfus Affair (Rudelle 1987: 32).

In January 1898, the writer Emile Zola published *J'accuse*, an open letter to the President of the Republic, in which he called into question the conviction of an army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, for espionage and treason (Cobban 1962: 56-7; Cahm 1996). The political crisis which followed led to the appointment of René Waldeck-Rousseau as head of a government of 'republican defence'. The challenges facing the new administration were to reassert and reinforce the legitimacy of the Third Republic's political institutions and to defuse the potentially explosive situation created by the Dreyfus Affair. Subject to a series of attacks in 1900 from the political Right, Waldeck-Rousseau reacted by declaring that his government was acting in accordance with 'the republican tradition'. More specifically, he presented his administration as the defender of a political tradition traceable back through 'a long line of liberal (*libéraux*) republicans' and constituted by '[s]ecular and parliamentary liberalism, military and colonial patriotism, the confidence placed in its government by the majority group (within Parliament) elected through universal suffrage, [and] economic and social progress' (Rudelle

1987: 34-5).<sup>12</sup> In so doing, Waldeck-Rousseau sought to attach the weight and legitimacy of a specifically 'republican' historical tradition (associated with a commitment to these fundamental political principles) to his government and to the institutions of the Third Republic more generally.

The conception of the republican tradition first articulated by Waldeck-Rousseau at the height of the Dreyfus Affair played an important part in shaping French politics over the next forty years (see Rudelle 1987: 35-40). This was to change, however, with the military defeat of 1940 and subsequent occupation of France by the German army. In the first place, the republican tradition's close association with the discredited institutions of the Third Republic, widely regarded as responsible for the country's collapse, significantly diminished its prestige thereafter. Secondly, the post-war modernisation of France made references to 'the republican idea (*l'idée républicaine*)' appear increasingly 'out-dated (*désuet*)' (Ozouf 1998). Finally, the influence of republicanism was further weakened after 1945 by the development of two competing political traditions: Gaullism and communism. After the proclamation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, for example, a 'symbolic system of honour and independence (*[une] symbolique d'honneur et d'indépendance*)' (Rudelle 1987: 41) evolved around the figure of de Gaulle which, for a time, overshadowed the republican tradition as a legitimating ideology.<sup>13</sup> In a similar way, an alternative revolutionary tradition was available to the Left during this period in the form of communism (Nora 1997b: 563-564).

According to Rudelle (1987), a resurgence of interest in the republican tradition only became possible in the 1980s, after the death of de Gaulle and in the context of 'disillusionment' with both the liberal and the socialist policies subsequently pursued by Presidents Giscard d'Estaing and

Mitterrand respectively. The perceived failure of the political projects associated with Gaullism and socialism, she suggests, led to a re-examination of traditions such as republicanism which appeared, in contrast, to have 'stood the test of time (*fait leurs preuves*)' (Rudelle 1987: 31. See Nora 1997b: 564 and Girling 1998: 48 for a similar argument.). The meaning and relevance of the republican legacy for French social and political life at the end of the twentieth century thus became the focus of a wide-ranging public debate, one which intensified during preparations for the Bicentenary of the 1789 Revolution.

In an important respect, arguments about the republican tradition in the 1980s differed significantly from those which had taken place at the beginning of the century. As noted earlier, the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906) had polarised public opinion and precipitated a political crisis which threatened the very survival of the Third Republic. Against this background, Waldeck-Rousseau's invocation of the republican tradition can be interpreted as an attempt to assert the legitimacy of a republican political order in the face of sustained opposition. By the 1980s, however, the existence of the Republic and its institutions had ceased to provoke the same level of hostility on the part of the political Right. Almost a century after the Dreyfus affair, the legitimacy of a republican regime no longer appeared to be contested by any of the major political formations. On the contrary, it was generally accepted that 'the foundational principles of republicanism had become firmly embedded in the fabric of French politics and society' (Hazareesingh 1994: 93). In particular, the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity were now formally embraced by parliamentary parties of the mainstream Right as well as the Left, with significant convergence as to the meaning and ordering of these principles.

There was, thus, a widespread perception in the 1980s that the basic tenets of republican ideology were the object of broad political agreement in France. It was generally held that 'the republican tradition' had come to be equated, consensually but rather narrowly, with a core set of founding principles or 'old minimal values (*vieilles valeurs minimales*)' (Nora 1997b: 566). As Rudelle accurately observed: 'in the 1980s ... evoking the "Republican Tradition" signifies nothing other than remembering the set of public freedoms on which the political consensus in France is based' (Rudelle 1987: 41).<sup>14</sup> This process of ideological convergence was interpreted by many commentators as marking the beginning of a new era in the history of French republicanism. The historian Pierre Nora, for example, emphasised the 'weakening (*affaiblissement*)' of republican ideology in the post-war period, arguing that it had 'lost its bite (*perdu de son mordant*)' and become 'a form without content (*une forme sans contenu*)' (1997b: 565, 562). Republicanism in France, he concluded, had completed its revolutionary and modern 'cycles' and was now entering a new phase in which it would exist 'neither as a combat ardently waged, nor as a tradition to which one is accustomed', but instead as 'a site of memory' (1997b: 566).<sup>15</sup> In a similar but more pessimistic vein, Petot claimed that young people in the 1980s were simply 'indifferent' to the key figures and ideas of the republican tradition, and that debates about secularism and the state school system seemed 'anachronistic and sterile (*anachroniques et stériles*)' (Petot 1989: 100).

Not all commentators, however, have viewed the emergence of 'a republican consensus' in the 1980s as evidence of a decline in the relevance or importance of republicanism in contemporary France. Hazareesingh (1994), for example, has drawn the opposite conclusion, arguing that during this period the 'absence of ideological dissonance was not ... a symptom of the



demise of republicanism; indeed, it constituted a triumph of the eminently republican notions of accommodation and compromise' (Hazareesingh 1994: 96). He claims that the 'essence' of republicanism lies precisely in this ability to cut across the political divisions of French society and to attract wide-ranging support for such fundamental notions as equality, democracy and secularism (1994: 67). For Hazareesingh, then, the emergence of a consensus over the meaning of these principles in the 1980s was a sign of republicanism's continued vigour and relevance rather than proof of its ossification.

This debate about republicanism's role in shaping contemporary French politics and society is an important part of the background to the present study. In the chapters which follow, I argue that the language and strategies of anti-racist organisations such as SOS-Racisme continue to be heavily influenced by republican ideologies and institutions. In particular, I suggest that the late 1980s and 1990s witnessed the formulation of a new or reinvented republican philosophy of national integration which has since dominated public discussion of immigration and anti-racism. Intellectuals, politicians, policy-makers and, I shall claim, SOS-Racisme were all active during this period in defining and promoting a 'republican model of integration (*modèle républicain d'intégration*)' as the basis for policies towards minority ethnic groups (see Chapter 7). In the final part of this section, I will introduce the main features of the so-called integrationist 'model' in France and outline the argument that it is currently in crisis.

The idea of a 'republican' model of integration, as a distinctive and coherent approach to immigration and to cultural and ethnic pluralism, began to gain currency among French politicians, policy-makers and intellectuals in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has quickly become the 'dominant idiom' in which

such issues are debated in France, replacing the narrower preoccupation with immigrants' socio-economic *insertion* previously characteristic of state policy (see Favell 1998: 41ff.). A powerful consensus has now emerged that contemporary immigration and integration policies should be based on 'republican' concepts of citizenship and the nation originating in the Revolutionary period and more fully elaborated during the Third Republic (1870-1940). It is argued that the classic conception of France as 'a universal nation of equal and free citizens', which underpinned both the unification of the French regions and the assimilation of European immigrants in the late nineteenth century, continues to be relevant today. Typically presented as a distinct model of political unity, republican citizenship is, in other words, also regarded as 'a formal institutional *legacy*' which is (or should be) determinant of the nature of current immigration and integration policies (see Favell 1998: 44).

The republican model of integration, therefore, reformulates policies on immigration and minorities in terms of a particular 'French' philosophy of citizenship and the nation, which Favell has referred to as the 'idiom of republican citizenship' (1998: 41). In so doing, it departs from more pragmatic approaches (such as *insertion*) concerned primarily with the management of social welfare issues. There are three main features of the republican model of integration which are usually highlighted in public (and academic) discussion of the topic. The first is its universalism, cosmopolitanism or inclusivity: access to French nationality and citizenship is presented as potentially open to all residents (regardless of origin) who adhere to the 'republican values' on which polity unity is founded. This leads directly to the model's second characteristic which is an emphasis on the voluntaristic or elective basis of French national unity. The 'French'



conception of the nation, it is argued, makes active political participation and a conscious commitment to republican principles the conditions of membership, rather than ties of blood, ethnicity or 'race' (see Favell 1998: 61).

Finally, the republican model defines integration as an individual process and excludes any official recognition of ethnic and cultural minorities by the state. It is, for example as individual citizens rather than as members of minority groups that immigrants are to be granted equal rights, with their 'integration' occurring not collectively but instead 'individual after individual (*individu après individu*)' (Kepel 1991: 381).<sup>16</sup> Underlying this aspect of the republican model of integration is a key distinction between public and private spheres: while the existence of cultural and ethnic pluralism in the private sphere is to be accepted and even encouraged, there is a refusal to institutionalise ethnic, cultural or religious differences in the public sphere or to distinguish between different categories of French citizens according to their origin (see Favell 1998: 70ff.)

The consolidation of a broad political consensus among elites in France about the distinctiveness and *superiority* of this 'republican' approach to the integration of minorities into the nation-state is one of the most important developments in French politics since the mid-1980s. In Chapter 7, I argue that the framing of contemporary immigration and integration policies in terms of a republican 'model' dating back to the Third Republic can be analysed both as an example of 'the invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and as an attempt to redefine French national identity for the 1990s. I want to conclude this section, however, with a very few brief comments on recent debates, in which SOS-Racisme has played a prominent part, about the 'crisis' of the republican model of integration (see, also, Chapters 7 and 10).

As Michel Wieviorka (1997a: 7) has noted, the idea that the republican model of integration is currently in a state of crisis has become widespread since the mid-1980s. In a 1991 newspaper interview, for example, Harlem Désir (SOS-Racisme's first president) declared that 'we have a society in France which has in the past been a wonderful melting-pot [but] whose model of integration has now broken down' (*L'Humanité*, 21 March 1991).<sup>17</sup> Underpinning such assertions is a belief that it is increasingly difficult for the Republic's core institutions to perform their 'traditional' role of integrating individuals into the nation-state by promoting respect for republican values and opening access to citizenship. Of these institutions, the state school has tended to be the focus of recent debates. On the one hand, there is a perception that rather than reducing social inequalities and facilitating integration state schools are actually contributing to processes of segregation and exclusion. On the other, the appearance at a number of state schools of young Muslim women wearing headscarves has led many commentators to speak of a 'crisis' of secularism. These developments, along with urban deprivation, rising unemployment and the declining influence of trade unions are frequently assumed to be undermining the foundations of the republican model of integration (see Wieviorka 1990).

In this section I have presented a preliminary account of ongoing French debates about the contemporary significance of 'the republican tradition' and about the origins and current 'crisis' of the republican model of integration. The argument which I develop over the course of the thesis is that SOS-Racisme has played an influential role in public discussion of these (and other) issues. More specifically, I suggest that the association has articulated and actively sought to promote a distinctively 'republican' conception of national integration, and made prominent interventions in controversies

over the 'crisis' of anti-racism, the meaning of secularism and the future of the state school system. In each case I will situate the particular positions adopted by SOS-Racisme in their wider political, institutional and intellectual context. SOS-Racisme's contribution to debates about republicanism or anti-racism, however, must also be viewed more narrowly against the background of the association's own creation in 1984 and evolution over the subsequent decade. In the final section of this introductory chapter, therefore, I provide an overview of SOS-Racisme's first ten years as a way of contextualising the more recent events which are the thesis's primary focus.

### SOS-Racisme: 'Touche pas à mon pote'

The origins of SOS-Racisme can effectively be traced back to the victory of the Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Mitterrand at the May 1981 presidential election. The left-wing government which was subsequently formed under Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy quickly introduced several pieces of legislation intended to signal its determination to break with the repressive immigration policies of the previous centre-right administration. One of these new, and symbolically important, measures was the law of 9 October 1981 which granted foreigners the right of association. Previously, foreigners had been required to obtain prior authorisation from the Interior Minister before forming an association and stringent conditions were attached. The new Socialist legislation removed these restrictions and resulted in a significant increase in the political mobilisation of North Africans (Wihtol de Wenden 1991: 320-1, 1992; Weil 1988: 58-9, 1995: 212ff.).<sup>18</sup>

The associations formed by young people of immigrant origin in the suburbs of cities such as Paris and Lyons after 1981 were initially designed to promote their self-organisation and participation in local life (Dabène 1990; Dazi-Heni and Polac 1990). However, several events occurred over the next two years which were to radicalise the activity of many of these groups and focus it on issues of racism, equal rights, unemployment and police violence. The summers of 1982 and 1983 witnessed a series of racist incidents in which young people, predominantly of North African origin, were shot and killed either by police officers or by other (white) inhabitants of their housing estates. In the intervening period, a group of Franco-Maghrebians living on the Lyons high-rise estate Les Minguettes staged a twelve-day hunger strike to protest against poor housing conditions. The leader of the hunger-strikers, Toumi Djaïdja, was himself later shot and nearly killed by a police officer in June 1983. The fact that the perpetrators of such crimes were frequently either acquitted or given light sentences by the courts only served to increase the sense of injustice experienced by young people of immigrant origin. The success of the far-right Front national in the September 1983 municipal by-election in Dreux (sixty kilometres west of Paris) further fuelled their fears about racism in French society (Jazouli 1992: 43-52; Hargreaves 1991; Singer 1991).

In response to these events, Toumi Djaïdja and other young people living in Les Minguettes estate decided to organise a nation-wide march, as a form of non-violent protest to the racism, police brutality and poverty with which they were confronted. Assisted by a Catholic priest, Christian Delorme, they prepared the 'March For Equality and Against Racism' (*la Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racismisme*)<sup>19</sup> which left Marseilles in October 1983 almost unnoticed by politicians and the (Parisian) media alike. When the march

finally arrived in Paris on 3 December 1983, however, the demonstrators numbered 100,000 and a delegation was received by President Mitterrand in the glare of the national media. Mitterrand used the occasion to announce the creation of a single residence and work permit (valid for ten-years and automatically renewable) for foreigners (Hargreaves 1991; Bouamama 1994).

The 1983 March brought the existence of the so-called 'second generation' to public attention. It also represented a key stage in the political mobilisation of young people of immigrant origin in France (see Wihtol de Wenden 1994, 1995a and b). Nevertheless, the subsequent attempt, in June 1984, to create a national structure for the movement revealed significant divisions between the Parisian and Lyons-based collectives which had been formed after the march. In particular, a split emerged between those who favoured the construction of an autonomous 'Maghrebian' movement, and those committed to working closely with French anti-racist and other organisations. This led to the disintegration of the Parisian collective, but a group of its former members launched an appeal in July 1984 for a second march which came to be known as Convergence 84. The organisers aimed to highlight the culturally and ethnically mixed nature of French society and also the importance of strategic co-operation between Franco-Maghrebian and traditional anti-racist associations. However, the unfolding of Convergence 84 served instead to underline the gulf between French anti-racist activists and young people of immigrant origin and the march ended in Paris in an atmosphere of disillusionment and recriminations (Jazouli 1992: 81-94; Bouamama 1994: 89-107).

It was at the final Parisian rally of Convergence 84 that members of SOS-Racisme made their first public appearance, selling a badge bearing the slogan 'Hands off my pal (*Touche pas à mon pote*)' (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: SOS-Racisme Sticker: 'Touche pas à mon pote'



The association had been founded several months previously by a group of Paris-based students and political activists opposed to racist violence and the rise of the FN. The badge proved extremely popular with young people and by the end of March 1985 over 300,000 had been sold (*Libération*, 25 March 1985). In the intervening period, SOS-Racisme's articulate and charismatic president, Harlem Désir, appeared on a current affairs television programme and generated valuable publicity for the new association.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter, its profile was further raised by prominent intellectuals, entertainers, media figures and politicians who agreed to wear the badge publicly and act as sponsors (*parrains*) (see Chapter 2). All of these factors contributed to a highly successful first six months for SOS-Racisme which culminated in the organisation of a free concert at the Place de la Concorde in Paris on 15 June 1985 which was attended by an estimated 300,000 people (Désir 1985; Hargreaves 1991).

The rapid rise of SOS-Racisme did, however, generate a significant amount of controversy. The Franco-Maghrebian associations which had participated in the 1983 March and Convergence 84, for example, accused SOS-Racisme of attempting to marginalise their movement and of substituting a moral(istic) denunciation of racism for their specific demands for equal rights. The presence of members of the Jewish students' organisation UEJF (*Union des étudiants juifs de France*) and the perceived under-representation and limited influence of Franco-Maghrebians within the leadership of SOS-Racisme also caused concern (*Le Monde*, 10 May 1985; Kettane 1985: 33). Moreover, Harlem Désir's repeated insistence that SOS-Racisme was an independent and apolitical movement against racism and the FN increasingly came to be questioned. Critics on both the political left and right claimed that the PS was manipulating SOS-Racisme in order to mobilise

young people for the forthcoming legislative elections (*Le Figaro*, 28 March 1985 and *Le Monde*, 21 September 1985).<sup>21</sup>

In spite of these criticisms, SOS-Racisme continued to play a key role in French political life throughout the second half of the 1980s. The political context changed in March 1986 when the victory of the RPR-UDF at the legislative elections resulted in a period of 'cohabitation' between Jacques Chirac's centre-right government and the Socialist President Mitterrand. SOS-Racisme maintained a high public profile, however, particularly through its involvement in the student movement of November-December 1986 which forced the government to withdraw proposed reforms of higher education and the nationality code (Dray 1987; Brubaker 1992: Ch. 7). The following year, Harlem Désir's appearance on the television programme *L'Heure de Vérité* was watched by 5 million viewers (*L'Événement du jeudi*, 27 August-2 September 1987). As I explain in Chapter 7, Désir's remarks on this programme were widely interpreted as signalling SOS-Racisme's move away from 'multiculturalism' to a republican model of integration, and from a 'moral' to a more 'social' or grassroots form of anti-racism.

The re-election of François Mitterrand as President of the Republic in May 1988, and the Socialists' subsequent victory at the legislative elections, brought the first period of cohabitation to an end but renewed speculation about SOS-Racisme's links with the PS. It was claimed that Harlem Désir had, in effect, instructed the association's members to vote for Mitterrand during a rally held in the run-up to the presidential election (*Le Figaro*, 15 March 1988; *Le Canard enchaîné*, 16 March 1988). Similarly, the election of one of SOS-Racisme's founder-members, Julien Dray, as a PS deputy was regarded by many commentators as confirmation of the association's close relationship with the Socialists, in spite of Harlem Désir's constant assertion



of its independence (*Libération*, 18-19 June 1988). These allegations damaged SOS-Racisme's reputation but its campaigns, concerts and other initiatives continued to enjoy widespread public and media support in 1988.

However, the next few years witnessed a noticeable decline in SOS-Racisme's popularity and influence, partly as a result of its views on the so-called Islamic headscarf affair of 1989 and the Gulf War of 1990-91. The headscarf affair began in October 1989 when Ernest Chenière, the head-teacher of a state school in Creil (to the north of Paris), suspended three young Muslim students for wearing headscarves. According to Chenière, the young women's insistence on wearing the headscarf to their classes constituted an infringement of the secularism (*laïcité*) of the Republican school, enshrined in French law. In the public debate which ensued, SOS-Racisme aligned itself with Education Minister Lionel Jospin in opposing the women's exclusion. As I explain in Chapter 10, this position alienated many of the association's traditional supporters on the so-called 'secular left' (*la gauche laïque*). In a similar way, SOS-Racisme's opposition to the Gulf War of 1990-91 provoked the departure of many of its celebrity sponsors and tension within the association itself (*Le Monde*, 19 and 20-21 January 1991; Dray 1991).

The late 1980s and early 1990s were, therefore, difficult years for SOS-Racisme during which its positions on major issues of the day were often at variance with large sections of political and public opinion. This was in striking contrast to the situation in the mid-1980s, when it was the most influential and important organisation in France, not simply within the anti-racist movement but in the country as a whole (Duyvendak 1994: 235).<sup>22</sup> After the criticism of its stance over the Gulf War, SOS-Racisme was now described by many media commentators as having 'lost momentum (*en perte de vitesse*)' and requiring 'a new lease of life (*un second souffle*)'.

Speculation about the association's future intensified when Harlem Désir announced in 1992 that he intended to resign as president in order to create a new political party (*Libération*, 13-14 June 1992).

Harlem Désir's departure effectively brought the first phase of SOS-Racisme's development to a close. Under his presidency, the association had become established as a feature of the socio-political landscape, with committees in secondary schools, universities and neighbourhoods throughout France and in other European countries. It had also played a major part in shaping debate about immigration and integration in France during the second half of the 1980s. However, SOS-Racisme was experiencing increasing difficulty in making its voice heard and had been subject to repeated and sustained attacks in the press, particularly after the 1989 headscarf affair. The challenge facing Désir's successors was to relaunch the association with a strategy which would ensure its long-term survival and enhance the effectiveness of its interventions.

At a meeting of SOS-Racisme's National Council in September 1992, Fodé Sylla and Delphine Batho were elected as the association's new president and vice-president respectively. Both had previously held positions of responsibility in subsidiary organisations attached to SOS-Racisme: Sylla was president of OBU (*Organisation des banlieues unies*) which worked with young people in the suburbs, while Batho had headed the secondary school students' federation FIDL (*Fédération indépendante et démocratique lycéenne*) (see Chapter 2 for more information on these and other organisations linked to SOS-Racisme). Their election symbolised the apparent transfer of power to a younger generation with a different type of political experience to that of the association's founder-members. In particular, the choice of Sylla was widely interpreted in the media as a sign

that SOS-Racisme intended in the future to focus more on the question of the suburbs (*banlieues*) and the social problems experienced by their young inhabitants (*Libération*, 5-6 September 1992; *Le Monde*, 8 September 1992).<sup>23</sup>

The victory of the centre-right at the March 1993 legislative elections, however, radically changed the political context and determined the focus of SOS-Racisme's first campaign under its new leadership. The incoming government immediately tabled proposals for a reform of the nationality code and for legislation on immigration controls and asylum rights. Over the next few months, SOS-Racisme organised a series of demonstrations to resist these measures, which they represented as an attack on the rights of foreigners and their children in France (*Le Monde*, 28 April 1993; Wayland 1993). At the association's fourth Congress, which took place in July 1993, delegates reaffirmed their opposition to the government's plans and debated strategies for widening the protest. The nature of SOS-Racisme's subsequent mobilisation against the proposed reform of asylum rights is examined in detail in Chapter 9 of this thesis.

The July 1993 Congress is a significant moment in SOS-Racisme's history more generally because it provided the first real opportunity for the new leadership to outline its reflections on the association's future development. The National Bureau used the occasion to present delegates with a set of propositions and identified four main types of activity upon which SOS-Racisme's long-term survival depended: (1) the defence of immigrants (*immigrés*); (2) implantation in the social fabric; (3) campaigns to influence public opinion (*campagnes d'opinion*); and (4) work with young people (SOS-Racisme 1993b: 7-8). As a study of SOS-Racisme's initiatives and debates in the eighteen months which followed the July Congress, this thesis will explore how the association's members attempted to translate these

'orientations' into practice. Crucially, this involved decisions about the relative importance to be attached to each of the four activities mentioned above, and individual chapters will examine how priorities were determined in a range of specific contexts.

In this section I have presented a brief historical account of the main events leading up to SOS-Racisme's creation in 1984 as well as an overview of how the association evolved in the course of the next ten years. The present thesis focuses on the eighteen months following the July 1993 Congress which effectively 're-launched' SOS-Racisme under a new leadership. As I will show, however, the association's development during this later period was constrained, although to a lesser extent it was also enabled, by earlier political strategies and positions. Many members of the public, for example, continued to identify SOS-Racisme with its first president, Harlem Désir, despite the change of leadership. Similarly, the circumstances surrounding the association's creation and the nature of its links with the Socialist Party remained highly controversial matters. I will suggest, in fact, that there are a number of different and competing narratives of SOS-Racisme's history which constitute an important part of the contemporary context within which it operates (see Chapters 5-6). One of the tasks of this thesis will be to examine critically both the activist and academic forms of such narratives, and to challenge some of the received ideas about SOS-Racisme which they contain.

## Conclusion and Summary

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the French anti-racist association SOS-Racisme, based on fieldwork conducted in Paris between July 1993 and

December 1994. For reasons which will have become apparent in the last section, the summer of 1993 was an exciting and interesting time to begin research on SOS-Racisme. In the first place, the association had recently elected a new president and vice-president and appeared, to all intents and purposes, to be attempting to 're-launch' itself with a clearly-stated set of priorities and objectives. Secondly, the victory of the RPR-UDF coalition at the March 1993 legislative elections had radically altered the political context for anti-racist action in France. The new centre-right government under Prime Minister Edouard Balladur enjoyed a huge parliamentary majority and clearly approached 'cohabitation' with Socialist President Mitterrand from a position of strength. Far-reaching reforms of the nationality code and asylum rights were immediately introduced which encountered little serious opposition from a divided and demoralised Left. The challenge facing SOS-Racisme's leadership and grassroots activists was therefore of developing effective anti-racist strategies largely without the institutional support of their traditional political allies. How the association, itself undergoing internal changes, responded to this transformation of the political climate will be the subject of detailed examination in the pages which follow.

In this introductory chapter I have reviewed recent trends in the anthropology of France and in the discipline's approach to racism and anti-racism, summarised debates about the importance of republicanism in contemporary France, and provided a brief account of SOS-Racisme's creation and subsequent evolution. The material discussed forms a key part of the broader intellectual, historical and political context for the present study. Against this background, the main themes of the thesis, highlighted at the very beginning of the chapter, can now be re-stated. Firstly, a key issue addressed in the following thesis is *the 'crisis' of anti-racism* in contemporary

France. Over the last fifteen years, there has been mounting criticism of the strategic and conceptual weaknesses of the French anti-racist movement. A particular focus of attention has been the perceived shortcomings of SOS-Racisme, one of the most prominent anti-racist organisations to have emerged since the 1980s. Through a detailed, ethnographic study of SOS-Racisme, this thesis investigates the nature and extent of the contemporary 'crisis' of anti-racism in France, reaching conclusions which differ significantly from those of many other (mainly French) commentators.

A second major theme is *the republicanism of anti-racism* in contemporary France. This issue is addressed in two distinct but related ways. On the one hand, the thesis examines how republican ideologies and institutions have played a crucial part in determining both the form and content of SOS-Racisme's opposition to racism. On the other, it also explores SOS-Racisme's role in the re-invention of 'the republican tradition' and, more specifically, the notion of 'the republican model of integration' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the main arguments I develop, however, is that the association's attachment to a 'republican' philosophy of *intégration* has seriously limited the effectiveness of its contribution to the struggle against racism.

The final core concern of this thesis is with *the politics of anti-racism* in contemporary France. The term 'politics' here should be understood in both of the senses covered by the French (feminine) noun *politique*, namely policy as well as party politics and activism.<sup>24</sup> Although the emphasis in what follows will be on the complex relationship between SOS-Racisme and political parties, the concrete measures proposed by the association over the years to combat racism will also be discussed. Analysis of these aspects of anti-racist politics, it will be argued finally, generates important insights into



the nature of the contemporary 'crisis' of mainstream republican anti-racism in France.

The thesis has three parts. Part I ('Movement') introduces SOS-Racisme in more detail, develops a theoretical and conceptual framework for the thesis as a whole, and also provides a discussion of methodological issues. Chapter 2 describes SOS-Racisme's organisational structure and links with other organisations, and then considers different recruitment patterns and conceptions of the relationship between associative and political party activism. In the third chapter I examine current theoretical debates in social movements research and identify a set of core analytical concepts. The fourth chapter focuses on research methodology, comparing the strengths and weaknesses of an ethnographic approach to social movements with those of other methods. Building on the final section of the introductory chapter, Part II ('Tensions') moves on to discuss in detail the controversy over SOS-Racisme's origins and also the nature of its interventions in debates about national identity in the 1980s and 1990s. In Chapters 5 and 6 the existing literature on SOS-Racisme is reviewed and influential recent critiques of the conceptual weaknesses and ideological contradictions of the French anti-racist movement more generally are summarised and evaluated. The seventh chapter explores SOS-Racisme's role in the development of a form of republican nationalism during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and presents a critical analysis of the association's use of terms such as *métissage* and *intégration*.

The chapters in Part III ('Practice') are based more directly on empirical material collected during anthropological fieldwork on SOS-Racisme in Paris



from July 1993 to December 1994. The eighth chapter explores the relationship between collective identity construction, leadership strategies and the evaluation of political opportunities through a detailed examination of SOS-Racisme's involvement in a series of events which occurred during the run-up to the 1994 European elections. The next two chapters analyse the ways in which SOS-Racisme framed its interventions in a number of key public debates during 1993-1994 in terms of an appeal to 'the republican tradition'. Chapter 9 focuses on the strategies adopted by SOS-Racisme in its autumn 1993 campaign against government proposals to restrict the right to asylum. The tenth chapter then discusses SOS-Racisme's apparent change of position between 1989 and 1994 on the question of whether the secular Republic required the exclusion of young Muslim women wearing the *hidjab* from state schools. The conclusion reviews the thesis's main arguments and assesses the implications of this ethnographic study of SOS-Racisme for ongoing debates about the 'crisis' of republican anti-racism in contemporary France.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bromberger (1997) has provided a comprehensive review of this literature (see also Bromberger 1998 for a more recent collection of articles).

<sup>2</sup> This is similar, of course, to the way in which an urban anthropology developed in other places (see Hannerz 1980: 5). See Sanjek (1990) and Low (1996) for more recent reviews of the anthropological literature on cities published in English.

<sup>3</sup> The methodological problems associated with conducting anthropological fieldwork in an urban environment such as central Paris are addressed in Chapter 4 of the present thesis.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Abélès (1986, 1988a, 1990, 1991), Abélès and Jeudy (1997) and Pourcher (1990, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> A notable exception is the work of Steven Gregory (1993a and b, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Almost a decade earlier, Aptheker had argued in a similar way that: 'A literature on anti-racism is well overdue' (1987: 32).

<sup>7</sup> An example is Brittan's (1987) work on the Anti-Nazi League (ANL).

<sup>8</sup> But see Juhem (1998), as well as the work of Cathie Lloyd (1991, 1994, 1996, 1998) and Jim House (1997), two British researchers who have written on the French anti-racist movement from a sociological and historical perspective. A number of published accounts of the movement by its activists are discussed in some detail in Chapter 5 of the present thesis.

<sup>9</sup> In 1970, for example, Pierre-Jean Simon claimed that 'the sociology of interethnic and racial relations (*la sociologie des relations interethniques et des relations raciales*)' was one of the most 'underdeveloped (*sous-développées*)' areas of French social science. It is in fact only in the past decade, with notably the work of Michel Wieviorka (1991, 1992, 1993a and d, 1998) and his colleagues at the Centre d'analyse et d'intervention sociologiques (CADIS) in Paris, that a wide-ranging sociology of racism and anti-racism in contemporary France has begun to emerge.

<sup>10</sup> '[...] à la fois unitaire et divisée par des interprétations divergentes, fidèle à ses origines et variable, traduite dans les idées, les conduites politiques et les textes juridiques.'

<sup>11</sup> Both Hazareesingh (1998) and Nord (1995), however, have argued that this second or 'modern' phase in the history of French republicanism began during the Second Empire (1852-1870) and not, as much traditional republican historiography has asserted, only after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871).

<sup>12</sup> 'Libéralisme laïc et parlementaire, patriotisme militaire et colonial, confiance majoritaire du suffrage universel, progrès économique et social : tels sont donc, après trente ans d'existence, les quatre piliers d'une «tradition républicaine» vivante ...'

<sup>13</sup> As Guichard (1985: 298ff.) has shown, however, de Gaulle also used revolutionary and republican symbols (such as La Marseillaise and Marianne) to invest his power with legitimacy. Visual imagery involving the figure of de Gaulle himself is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

<sup>14</sup> '...dans les années 80 qui sont les nôtres l'évocation de la «tradition républicaine» ne signifie rien d'autre que le rappel de l'ensemble de libertés publiques sur lequel est fondé le consensus politique de la France.'

<sup>15</sup> 'Ni combat vécu dans l'ardeur, ni tradition vécue dans l'habitude. Un lieu de mémoire.'

<sup>16</sup> In the words of the *Haut conseil à l'intégration*, an official body set up by Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard in 1990, in the wake of the first 'headscarves affair': 'the French conception of integration must conform to a *logic of equality* [of individual citizens] *and not to a logic of minorities* (la conception française de l'intégration doit obéir à *une logique d'égalité et non à une logique de minorités*)' (HCI 1993: 35, original italics). This quotation provides a good illustration of the normative nature of much elite discussion of the republican model of integration (see Lorcerie 1994).

<sup>17</sup> '...nous avons une société française qui a été un formidable creuset et dont le modèle d'intégration est en panne.' The notion of 'the French melting-pot (*le creuset français*)' is also widely used in academic discussions of immigration and integration in France (see, for example, Noiriel 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Viet (1998: 428) notes that between 1981 and 1993 the number of associations increased from 600 to 4 000.

<sup>19</sup> The media subsequently labelled it 'The March of the *Beurs*', this being the backslang (*verlan*) term used primarily (but not exclusively) by young people of North African origin in the Parisian suburbs to define themselves. In this thesis, however, I will retain the original title 'The March For Equality and Against Racism' for two main reasons. Firstly, the term '*beur*' originated and was employed chiefly in the housing estates around Paris; young people of North African origin in the suburbs of Marseilles and Lyons, where the idea of the march was conceived, did not generally refer to themselves as '*beurs*' but rather as '*maghrébins*' (Wihtol de Wenden 1991: 330). The media's subsequent adoption and often indiscriminate use of the category '*beur*' has increasingly led to its rejection by young people even in Paris (Hargreaves and McKinney 1997: 20; Barbara 1992.). Secondly, the label 'The March of the *Beurs*' gives the impression that only people of North African origin were involved, whereas marchers from other 'immigrant communities' were also present, albeit in lesser numbers (Bouamama 1994: 68-70). In the light of the above points, I will refer throughout this thesis to young people of North African origin as *Franco-Maghrebians* and avoid the term '*beur*' as far as possible.

<sup>20</sup> As Negrouche (1992: 49) has indicated, Harlem Désir became 'a sort of Robin Hood of antiracism, highly prized by journalists (*une sorte de Robin des Bois de l'antiracisme, très prisé par les journalistes*).'

<sup>21</sup> See also Chapter 5 of the present thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Writing in 1988, the sociologist Alain Touraine even described SOS-Racisme as 'the most important and most positive of the movements which have traversed French society over the past few years (*le plus important et le plus positif des mouvements qui ont traversé la société française ces dernières années*)' (Touraine 1988b).

<sup>23</sup> See Sylla and Kowalevski (1993: 146ff.) for Sylla's own account of his involvement in OBU and subsequently SOS-Racisme.

<sup>24</sup> The meaning of the French word *politique* also varies depending on whether it is accompanied by the masculine or the feminine article. In the former case—*le politique*—it refers to politics in general, 'the political side of things', while *un politique* is a politician. In the latter case—*la politique*—it means either policy, as in *la politique extérieure du gouvernement* (the government's foreign policy), or politics in a narrower sense, e.g. *faire de la politique* (to be a political activist, to be in politics). These examples are taken from *The Collins Robert French Dictionary* (Second Edition, 1987).

## Part I : Movement

# Chapter 2

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## Structures, Actors and Identities

One day near the beginning of August 1993, I was walking along one of the seemingly interminable corridors of a Parisian metro station. I had arrived in the French capital a few weeks earlier, had started to rent a small studio flat and was now starting to get my bearings. (I had only been to Paris twice before for short visits.) As I walked along I glanced at advertisements, posters and graffiti on the walls of the metro station. Among these was a poster which contained a reference to a law against racism and an invitation to collect 'a passport against racism (*un passeport contre le racisme*)' from one of the six organisations listed at the bottom. I noted the details and duly visited the headquarters of each of these anti-racist and human rights organisations in turn, asking about the 'passport' and conducting several preliminary interviews (see Appendix 2B).

One of these organisations was SOS-Racisme. When I visited its headquarters I explained to the member of the National Bureau who received me that I was writing a thesis about anti-racism in France and would be interested in finding out more about the association. At this point I had not yet decided to focus on SOS-Racisme and simply intended to obtain some general information. The National Bureau member briefly retraced the association's history and described the campaigns in which it was currently involved, and then invited me to attend a meeting of its National Council the

following weekend. When I arrived at this meeting I sat down, quite by chance, next to one of the members of the local committee for the area in which I had rented a flat. At an interval we struck up a conversation and she invited me to the next meeting of the committee. Over the next eighteen months I participated in the activities of this committee of SOS-Racisme (members knew I was conducting research), and in other initiatives organised by the association at a national level.

In this account of my 'arrival' at SOS-Racisme I have referred to several levels of the association's structure – National Bureau, National Council and local committee. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure and an indication of the important links which it had with other organisations at the time of my fieldwork (1993-94). I also introduce some of the activists with whom I worked and consider how they became involved in the association. The chapter ends with a more general discussion of the concepts of identity and unity.

## The Organisational Structure of SOS-Racisme

In France, the principle of freedom of association is enshrined in a specific provision of the Common Law known as 'the 1 July 1901 Law' (*Journal Officiel de la République Française* 1901). This defines an association as 'the agreement by which two or more persons combine their knowledge or act together for a purpose other than that of profit-sharing' (Article 1).<sup>1</sup> The right of French citizens to form such associations freely, without the need for government authorisation or a preliminary declaration, is a cornerstone of the 1901 Law (Article 2). The latter also contains provisions allowing associations to obtain 'legal competence (*la capacité juridique*)', i.e. the right



to bring cases to court, or recognition as bodies 'with charitable status (*d'utilité publique*)', thus enabling them to receive subsidies (Articles 5, 6 and 10). In both cases, however, associations must first register and present their articles at the appropriate Préfecture (see Barats 1994: 332-4). These articles must, in addition, conform to a standard type or pro forma drawn up by the authorities and cover the association's composition and aims, administration and functioning, annual resources, internal regulations, and the modification of its articles and dissolution (see Debbasch and Bourdon 1997: 116-125).

In common with many other non-profit-making organisations in France, SOS-Racisme has the legal status of an association under the terms of the 1901 Law. It was officially registered as such in Paris in November 1984, with a view to obtaining legal competence and recognition as an association with charitable status (Désir 1985: 16). This was quickly followed by the creation of numerous local sections throughout France. Each section was registered as a separate association, and given the generic title 'Stop Racism Committee (*Comité Stop-Racisme*)' followed by the name of the specific town or district where it was based. To all intents and purposes, however, the Stop Racism Committees operate as the local sections of the association SOS-Racisme and their formally distinct existence will have little bearing on the issues discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, the name 'SOS-Racisme' strictly speaking denotes only the original association founded in 1984 and effectively existing uniquely at a national level.

The creation of SOS-Racisme and the Stop Racism Committees as associations regulated by the 1901 Law had important implications for their organisational structure. As I have already mentioned, an association seeking legal competence and/or charitable status must operate on the basis of a standard set of articles (*modèle de statuts*) prescribed by the authorities.

This pro forma includes articles relating to the association's basic structure, administration and *modus operandi*. There is a stipulation, for example, that the association be administered by a 'management committee (*conseil d'administration*)' elected at a general assembly meeting of its members. This committee is in turn responsible for electing a 'bureau' composed of a president, one or more vice-presidents, up to three secretaries, a treasurer and an assistant treasurer (see Debbasch and Bourdon 1997: 119-120).

Figure 2.1 presents an overview of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure. At the foot of the diagram are the organisation's local or grassroots branches, the Stop Racism Committees. As a formally constituted association in its own right, each one is administered by a management committee from which a smaller bureau is drawn. According to SOS-Racisme's president, 350 Stop Racism committees existed in 1996 (Sylla 1996a: 156).<sup>2</sup> Every two to three years, the members of these committees are invited to attend a National Congress of SOS-Racisme.<sup>3</sup> This is the meeting of the association's general assembly, at which members are elected to serve on the National Council (the equivalent of a 'Management Committee').<sup>4</sup> The National Council normally meets every two to three months, although 'extraordinary' meetings can also be called in the intervening period should the need arise. During my fieldwork, all National Council meetings were held in Paris, a situation resented by many activists from the provinces (see Chapters 7 and 9).

It is the National Council which, in turn, elects the members of SOS-Racisme's National Bureau. As well as the association's president, vice-president(s), secretary and treasurer, the National Bureau includes a number of other members with national responsibilities (relations with the press or with other organisations, for example). In 1993-94, meetings of the National

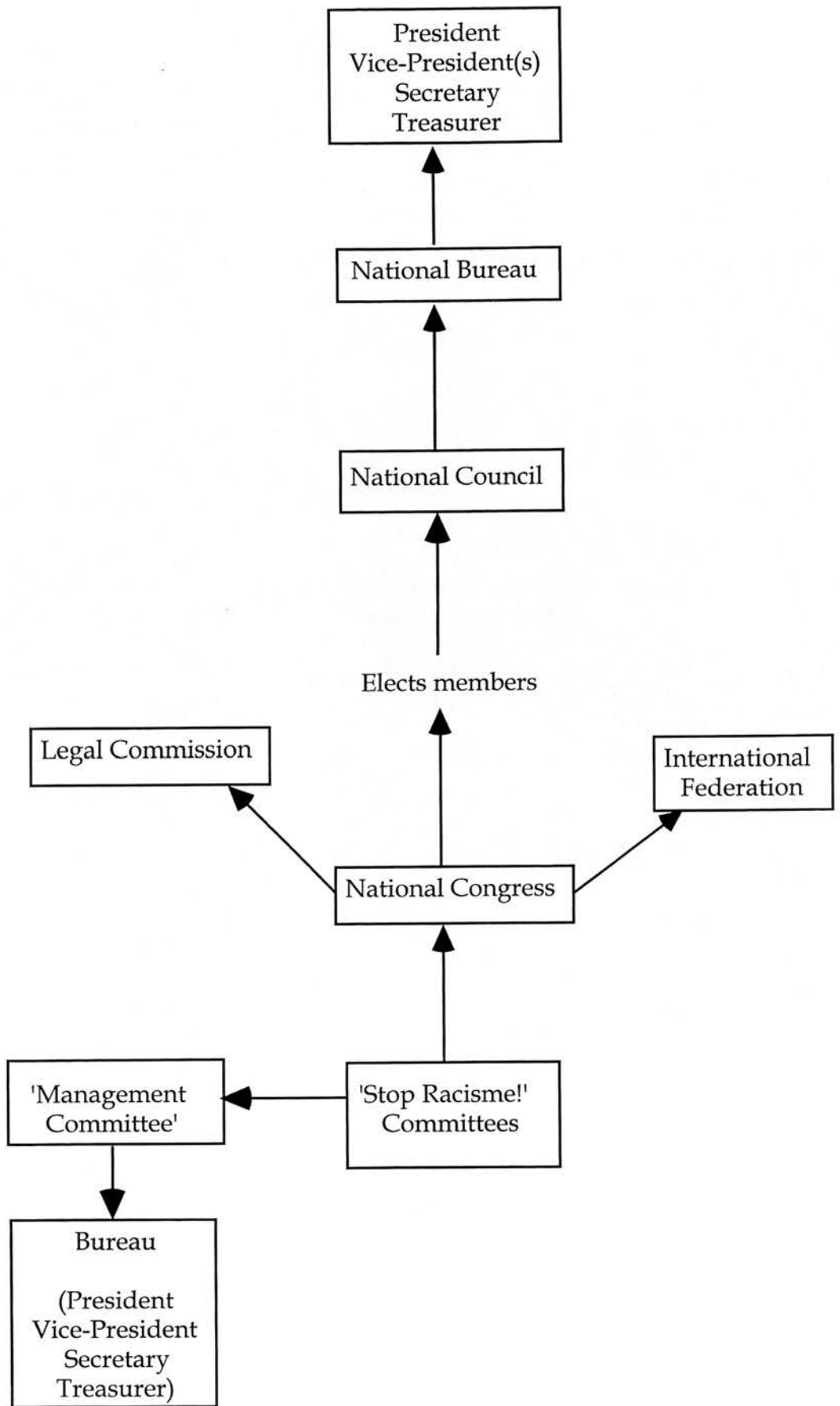


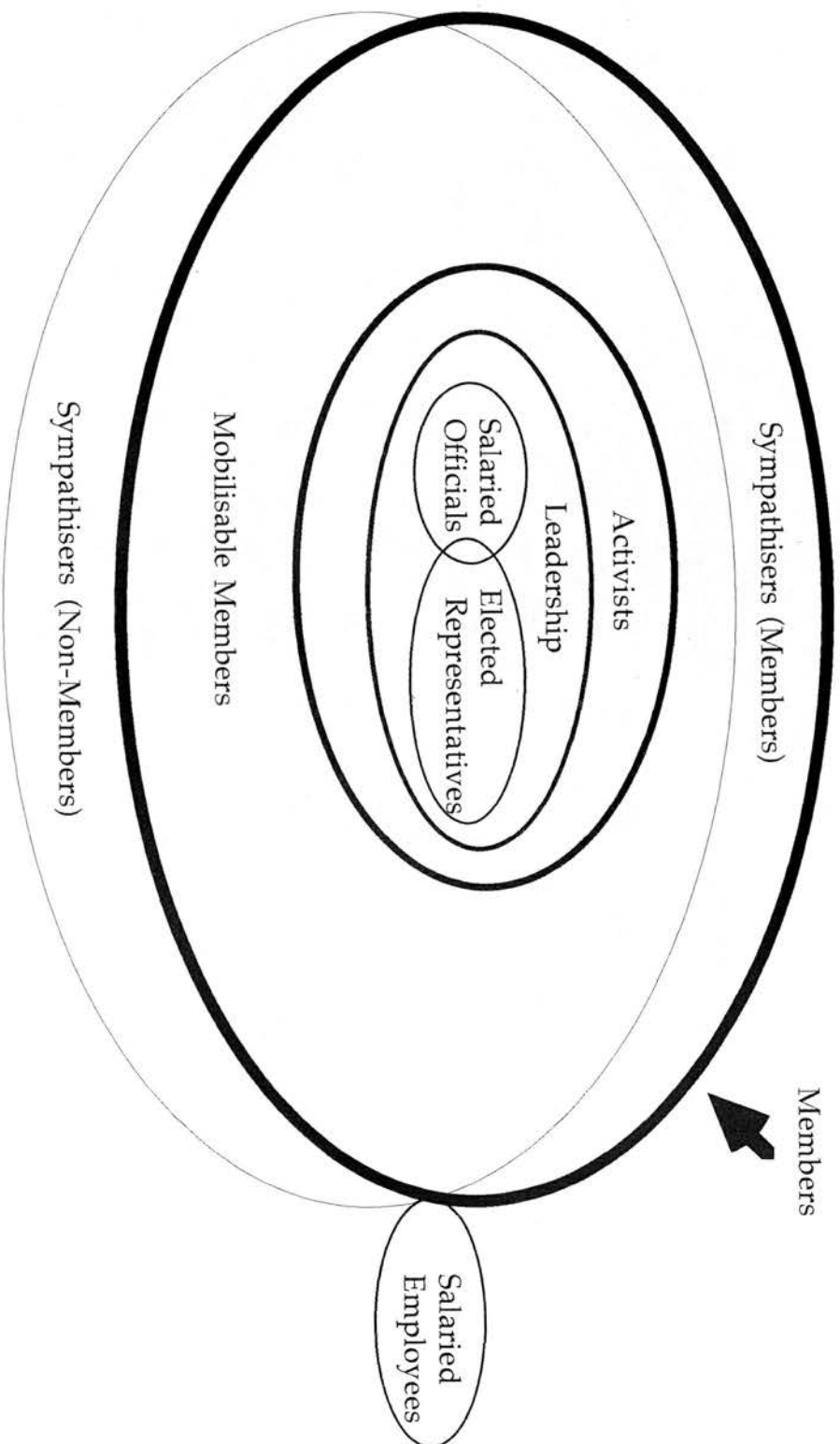
Figure 2.1 The Organisational Structure of SOS-Racisme

Bureau usually took place on a weekly or fortnightly basis at the association's Parisian offices, with around twenty people in attendance. Several activists I interviewed described the National Bureau as the equivalent of a 'government' in that its role was primarily 'executive'. The National Council, on the other hand, was likened to a 'parliament' where issues were debated and decisions taken after a vote. Although it was acknowledged that the National Bureau also played a decision-making role, the higher authority (or 'sovereignty') of the National Council was repeatedly stressed.<sup>5</sup>

The final two parts of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure highlighted in Figure 2.1 are the Legal Commissions and the International Federation. The Legal Commissions (*Commissions juridiques*) are frequently attached to and staffed by members of the Stop Racism Committees. They exist to provide legal advice to the public on matters such as racism and discrimination, the entry and residence rights of foreigners, and asylum procedures. In 1996, SOS-Racisme claimed to operate 100 Legal Commissions in towns and cities across France (Sylla 1996a: 154). The International Federation of SOS-Racisme, on the other hand, groups together the various organisations of this name which now exist across the world. It is composed of 15 organisations mainly from Europe, but also from countries such as Brazil, Canada and Senegal (Sylla 1996a: 157). The International Federation meets on an annual basis and the different branches are in close contact by telephone, fax and e-mail.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these different parts of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure, it is important to distinguish between different types of participant in the association. Hedoux (1988: 170-1) has proposed an empirical definition of actors in associations and I intend to adopt a slightly modified version of his

**Figure 2.2 Types of Participant in an Association**  
 (based on Hedoux 1988: 171, Diagram 1)



classification here (see Figure 2.2). The 'members (*adhérents*)' of an association, firstly, can be defined as those who have paid their annual subscription, and are thus not simply 'users (*usagers*)' of services which it may provide.

A further distinction can be drawn between the following types of members: 'activists (*militants*)' regularly devote their time, energy and other resources to the association and perform the various tasks which are necessary to its daily operation; 'mobilisable members' are those whose direct involvement in the association's activities is more sporadic and who constitute the main group which activists seek to mobilise for specific events; 'sympathiser' members, finally, are those whose participation in the association is limited to the payment of the annual subscription fee.

The association's 'leadership (*direction*)' can be considered as a part of the activist category, and comprises salaried officials, such as the president and vice-president, and elected representatives. In the case of SOS-Racisme, the National Bureau can be regarded as the equivalent of the association's leadership.

The present thesis will be primarily concerned with activists in SOS-Racisme at both local and national levels, although long-term participant observation in a local committee did enable me to make contact with members and supporters whose involvement was more sporadic. Later in this chapter I introduce some of the activists in the committee of which I was a member, but first it is necessary to consider the links which exist between SOS-Racisme and other organisations and which make up what I propose to call the association's 'nebula'.

## The SOS-Racisme 'Nebula' (1993-94)

The anti-racist movement in France can be viewed as a network of organisations, groups and individuals committed to combating racism and discrimination. The joint committees (*collectifs*) formed to organise national and local demonstrations (and other initiatives) are important nodal points of this network. Lists of organisations calling for a demonstration are routinely printed in the press or on collectively-written leaflets; these are material expressions of links which most of the time are not publicly visible but are, in Melucci's (1989: 70) terms, 'submerged' or 'latent'. As part of the anti-racist movement, SOS-Racisme is involved in such relationships with a range of other anti-racist, immigrant and ethno-cultural organisations.

However, SOS-Racisme is also closely associated with a number of specific political parties, student unions and other organisations not directly part of the anti-racist movement. I propose to refer to this cluster of groups, including the anti-racist association itself, as the SOS-Racisme 'nebula' (see Figure 2.3). For analytical purposes, the organisations and/or groups of individuals concerned can be divided into two distinct types. The first comprises organisations and bodies which were themselves created by SOS-Racisme; I shall refer to these as 'dependent' organisations in the sense that they came into being after, and to a large extent through the action of, the anti-racist association. The second type is represented by organisations such as the Socialist Party (PS), the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and UNEF-ID (a student union) which were already well-established by the time SOS-Racisme was formed in the mid-1980s. In each case, SOS-Racisme is effectively linked not to the organisation as a whole but rather to one of its factions or tendencies. All three organisations also contain factions which are actively hostile to SOS-Racisme. I propose, therefore, to refer to this second



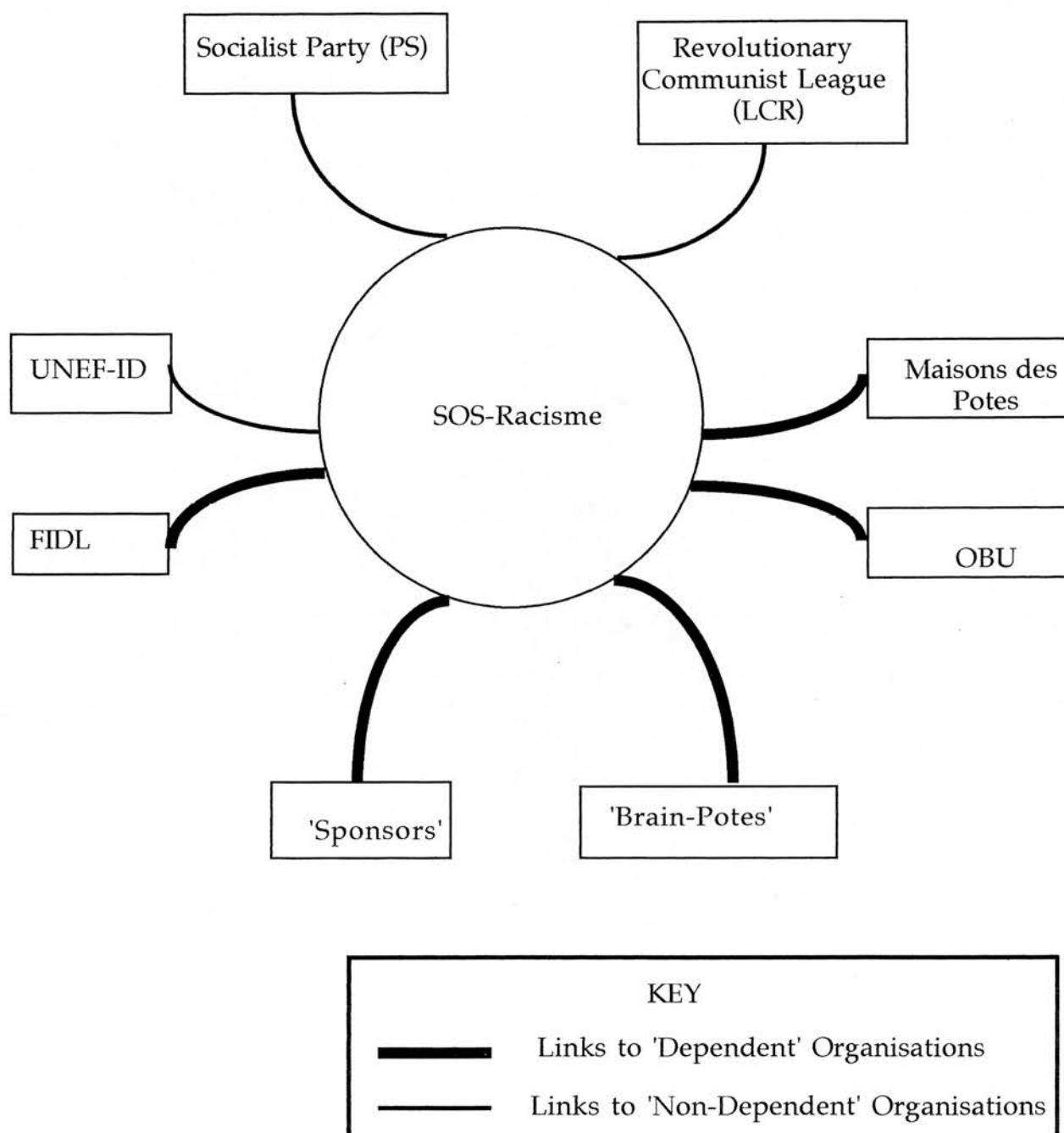


Figure 2.3 The SOS-Racisme 'Nebula' (1993-94)

type as 'non-dependent' organisations. The various 'dependent' and 'non-dependent' organisations composing the SOS-Racisme nebula during the period of my fieldwork (1993-94) will now be described.

The bodies and groups which I am labelling 'dependent' organisations are the following: celebrity sponsors, Brain-Potes, FIDL, Maison des Potes, and OBU (see Glossary). Shortly after the creation of SOS-Racisme, its founding-members actively sought the support of celebrity 'sponsors (*parrains*)' among the intelligentsia and in the fields of the arts, show business and the media. According to Harlem Désir, the philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy (or 'BHL', as he is popularly known) played a key role in persuading other celebrities to join a 'sponsorship committee (*comité de parrainage*)' which helped to publicise the newly-formed association (Désir 1985: 47). Although a number of these celebrities subsequently broke publicly with SOS-Racisme (particularly over the latter's opposition to the Gulf War), the association was still able, in 1993-94, to attract the support of stars such as the raï singer Khaled for concerts and other events which it organised.

The working group of intellectuals and academics 'Brain-Potes' was formed in the aftermath of a conference which SOS-Racisme organised at the Sorbonne in June 1987 (*Libération*, 20-21 June 1987; *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 24 June 1987). Its stated objective was to assist members of the association in formulating policy proposals on immigration and integration, and its work has resulted in a number of publications (Désir and SOS-Racisme 1987; SOS-Racisme 1990). During the period of my fieldwork (1993-94), however, a more prominent role was played by a group of jurists who worked with SOS-Racisme to produce a guide to the legislation governing foreigners' rights (Barats 1994).

The FIDL (Fédération indépendante et démocratique lycéenne) is a federation of secondary school students (*lycéens*) which was created by Julien Dray and others close to SOS-Racisme during the 1986-87 student movement. In 1994 it claimed to have 1 000 members, mainly concentrated in the Paris area (*Le Monde*, 30 March 1994). Delphine Batho, who was elected vice-president of SOS-Racisme in 1992, had previously been the president of FIDL and played a prominent part in the 1990 secondary school students' movement.

The 'Maisons des Potes' are the advice or community centres which members of SOS-Racisme have created in the suburbs (*banlieues*) of a number of French cities since 1989. Their stated objective has been to act as 'relays between the administration and the social sector (*des relais entre l'administration et le secteur social*)', through the provision of workshops, homework clubs (*soutien scolaire*) and advisory services (*Le Monde*, 7 February 1989). By 1993, the various centres in France had been linked in a 'National Federation' based in Saint-Denis which published a quarterly magazine *Potapote*.

The 'Organisation of United Suburbs' (OBU) was founded by Fodé Sylla and other members of SOS-Racisme in December 1990 following violent disturbances at housing estates (*cités*) in Vaulx-en-Velin, to the east of Lyons (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6-12 June 1991. Cf. Sylla and Kowalevski 1993: 163-166). By the start of 1992, sixty youth organisations based in the suburbs (*banlieues*) of French cities had become federated under the umbrella of OBU. Its stated objective was to act as an intermediary between the State and urban youth, drawing attention to the latter's problems in the areas of schooling, training, work, housing and so on (*Le Monde*, 25 January and 19

May 1992). The leading spokesperson of OBU, Fodé Sylla, was elected president of SOS-Racisme in September 1992.

In addition to the above, three 'non-dependent' organisations can be distinguished: the Socialist Party, the Revolutionary Communist League, and UNEF-ID. The nature of the relationship between SOS-Racisme and the Socialist Party (PS) has been the subject of considerable debate and even controversy since the association's creation in 1984 (see Chapter 5). In my view, the most useful way of approaching this question is, however, to explore SOS-Racisme's links with particular factions or currents within the PS, rather than with the party as a whole. As Bell and Criddle (1988: 220-245) have explained, the Socialist Party is not a homogeneous entity, but is instead composed of a number of rival groups usually identified with an existing or potential party leader or presidential candidate. These internal divisions were played out in the field of anti-racism in the mid-1980s: SOS-Racisme attracted the support of the currents associated with François Mitterrand and Laurent Fabius, whereas a competing organisation, France-Plus, was promoted by the Lionel Jospin and, later, the Michel Rocard currents (see Geisser 1997: 34; Bouamama 1994: 126).

During the period of my fieldwork (1993-94), SOS-Racisme was closely identified, both inside and outside the organisation, with the 'Socialist Left (*Gauche socialiste*)' current in the PS. This is not surprising, as the Socialist Left was established by one of the founders of SOS-Racisme, Julien Dray, who was elected as a PS deputy for the Essonne in 1988. Formerly known as 'Socialist Questions (*Questions socialistes*)' or 'New Socialist School (*Nouvelle école socialiste*)', and comprising many ex-Trotskyists from the LCR (see below), it views itself as the left-wing of the Socialist Party (see Amard et al 1997). Other prominent members are the PS Senator for the

Essonne Jean-Luc Mélenchon, and the former Housing Minister and now Socialist deputy of the European Parliament, Marie-Noëlle Lienemann. The current publishes a journal, *Données et arguments* ('Data and Arguments') and a weekly newsletter, *À gauche* ('Left').

Although the Socialist Left and SOS-Racisme are not connected in any formal sense, they are nevertheless linked in a number of important ways. In the first place, the founder of the Socialist Left, Julien Dray, continues to play a decisive role within SOS-Racisme, even though he resigned as Vice-President of the association in 1988 following his election to the National Assembly (*Le Monde*, 21 June 1988). During my fieldwork, the nature of Dray's influence was indeed the subject of debate among grassroots activists on several occasions (see Chapters 7 and 9). Dray is widely recognised as the intellectual leader of SOS-Racisme, although he has also at times provided limited financial support (several circulars I received from the association, for example, acknowledged Dray's contribution towards the costs of printing and postage). A second indicator of the close relationship between SOS-Racisme and the Socialist Left is the high level of membership and activism in both groupings. In 1993-94, the majority of those sitting on SOS-Racisme's National Bureau were thus also members of, and in some cases actively involved in, the Socialist Left tendency of the PS. Within the anti-racist association as a whole (and particularly in Paris), activists identified with the Socialist Left similarly constituted the most influential 'tendency'. Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that not all SOS-Racisme activists are members of the Socialist Party: a significant number are 'nowhere (*nulle part*)', i.e. not associated with any particular political party, while a sizeable minority are supporters of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

The Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) is the French Section of the Fourth International founded by Trotsky in 1938. It was formed in 1974 and currently claims around 2 000 members spread over fifty towns and cities. In June 1999, the LCR's official 'spokesperson (*porte-parole*)', Alain Krivine, was among the five far-left candidates elected to the European Parliament. Of all the Trotskyist movements in France, the LCR has been described as 'the most Leninist' in view of the importance which it attaches to organisation and ideological instruction (Borella 1990: 227-231). The LCR publishes the weekly newspaper *Rouge* and, at the time of my fieldwork, contained several competing currents or tendencies.

Many of SOS-Racisme's founding-members were active in the LCR and in student politics during the 1970s, before joining the Socialist Party in 1981-1982 (Spire 1996: 298). Their subsequent decision to launch the association was, however, not supported by all tendencies within the LCR. Indeed, the dominant tendency, associated with Krivine, was openly critical of SOS-Racisme from the outset. It was instead the members of a minor tendency, known as '*tendance 1 (T1)*' and led by Gérard Filoche, who joined SOS-Racisme in large numbers and sought to influence its future development (Filoche 1998: 279). During most of my fieldwork, the presence of Filoche and other members of the LCR constituted an important counter-balance to the influence of the Socialist Left within SOS-Racisme (see Chapter 8). There was, nonetheless, significant common political ground between the Trotskyist current and the Socialist Left, as subsequent events confirmed. Following the effective exclusion of Filoche's tendency from the LCR in June 1994, the majority of its members voted to join the Socialist Party and in the summer of 1995 they fused with the Socialist Left into a single current (see Filoche 1998: 321-335).

The final 'non-dependent' organisation is the student union UNEF-ID. In 1971, the main student union in France, UNEF (*Union nationale des étudiants de France*/National Union of French Students), divided into several separate organisations. The tendency close to the French Communist Party (PCF) formed UNEF-Renouveau, which later became UNEF-SE (UNEF-Solidarité étudiante/UNEF-Student solidarity). The Socialist current (UNEF-US), on the other hand, joined in 1980 with two other non-communist groupings (MAS and COSEF) to form UNEF-ID (UNEF-Indépendante et démocratique/UNEF-Independent and Democratic). At the time of my fieldwork, UNEF-ID was the largest student union in France, claiming around 10 000 members (*Le Monde*, 30 March 1994).

A number of different political currents exist within UNEF-ID, generally reflecting divisions inside the Socialist Party, to which the union is politically close. One such tendency is linked to SOS-Racisme and the Socialist Left, a connection which can be traced back to the 1986 student movement (Dray 1987). During the 1990s, the 'SOS-Racisme' current has been actively involved in shaping the internal composition and future direction of UNEF-ID. In January 1993, for example, a new tendency (*Indépendance et action* [IA]) was created by eight members of the union's National Bureau who had previously belonged to the majority current. IA then joined the currents associated with SOS-Racisme (*Tendance TSOD*), the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and supporters of Jean-Pierre Chevènement (a prominent figure in the PS) in forming a larger block called the *Tendance indépendance et démocratie* (TID). At UNEF-ID's 73rd Congress in May 1993, the TID succeeded in winning 15 seats on the National Bureau (including treasurer and vice-president), compared to 17 for the majority current (*Le Monde*, 4 February and 13 May 1993). In December 1994, near the end of my fieldwork, UNEF-ID held its 74th Congress in Paris, and again



the 'SOS-Racisme' current was heavily involved in challenging the incumbent majority (*Le Monde*, 15 December 1994).

### A Parisian 'Stop-Racism' Committee

The 'Stop Racism' committee which I joined in Paris in the autumn of 1993 was in the process of being 're-launched' after a period of relative inactivity. For the first few months during which I was involved, meetings were usually attended by between four and seven activists and the focus of the discussions was on electing a new team of office-holders (or Bureau). Over the course of the next year, however, the number of people regularly attending meetings gradually increased to around a dozen, as new members arrived and several former members returned to play an active part in the life of the committee. For the most part, committee activists were in their late 20s or early 30s (although a few were older), professionals or white-collar workers (teachers, clerical assistants, employees in state-owned or partially privatised industries), and white, French nationals (although one member was from North Africa and another from sub-Saharan Africa).

Meetings were usually held on a fortnightly basis in central Paris. I attended these and participated in other initiatives which the committee organised, such as public meetings, distributions of leaflets, joint activities with other local associations and so on. Initially, my lack of fluency in spoken French meant that I contributed little in meetings although I was able to comprehend most of the discussions (on the other hand, it took me some time to learn Parisian *argot*). However, when a new Bureau was elected in the spring of 1994, a range of more informal 'posts' was created and I was invited to assume responsibility for co-ordinating the distribution of leaflets.

The three main political 'tendencies' within SOS-Racisme which I distinguished earlier (Socialist Left current of the Socialist Party, Revolutionary Communist League, and those without a party political affiliation) were all represented in the local committee. The acting president, when I arrived, was Laurence (all names of local activists are pseudonyms), a teacher in her early 30s and an active member of the Socialist Left. She became an activist in the association in the late 1980s, although she had been closely acquainted with it from the outset:

I knew SOS-Racisme from the start from the inside. I was right at the heart of things because I was friends with the people who were among those who founded SOS-Racisme. (Tape-recorded interview with Laurence, 7 December 1994)<sup>7</sup>

For Laurence, participation in the association's activities formed part of a larger political project, that of the Socialist Left current of which she was a member:

For me SOS-Racisme is an association, from my point of view as an activist of the Socialist Left, whose function is to be an instrument which allows us to be in contact with the population, with people who are not in [political] parties, in other words, in contact with that part of the society which is the world of associations.<sup>8</sup>

The place of SOS-Racisme in the broader political strategy of the Socialist Left was also described to me by Luc, who was to become the committee's president in 1994. He had participated actively in the launch of SOS-Racisme and explained that:

We developed this association because we wanted ... Our analysis was to say: 'We need to have one foot outside the political party, and one foot inside.' So, we need to carry weight within the party, notably the Socialist Party, and, at the same time, we need to have a mass organisation outside which pushes [the party]. And SOS-Racisme is that mass organisation. (Tape-recorded interview with Luc, 3 November 1994)<sup>9</sup>

The role of associations such as SOS-Racisme, in other words, was to put external pressure on the Socialist Party through mass action.

The only committee member closely identified with the Revolutionary Communist League, Didier, had been involved since the mid-1980s. He told me:

I joined SOS in 1986. Why? Well, because at the time I was in a political current which was the Revolutionary Communist League. And I was in a tendency which is roughly speaking the tendency in which Gérard Filoche was present. And that tendency analysed SOS in positive terms. And as there was an increase in problems of racism and xenophobia, and more and more attacks on immigrants, at a certain point SOS appeared a bit like the organisation that was leading the fight against that and so I joined. (Tape-recorded interview with Didier, 28 November 1994)<sup>10</sup>

Here again, links to SOS-Racisme's founder members and their political groupings were a key factor in the process of recruitment to the association. In a similar way to the activists already mentioned, Didier also placed his activity in SOS-Racisme in the context of a wider political project, which in this case was the development of a revolutionary party:

As far as I'm concerned, in the building of a revolutionary party there is an element of political training, understanding the State, understanding the nature of the bourgeois State and so on. So, that is necessary, that education must be given. But at the same time the role of revolutionary activists is also to be actors in mass movements, to allow workers, young people, etc. to organise and to score points in the battle of forces with the enemy, the State.<sup>11</sup>

For members of both the Socialist Left and the Revolutionary Communist League, in other words, SOS-Racisme had a clearly defined political role and it was in relation to this that they explained their own participation.

However, the local committee also included several people whose decision to join SOS-Racisme had been motivated by other reasons. For example, a

student in her mid-20s who had been the committee's secretary when I arrived, told me that:

I started to be an activist at SOS in 1990. At the time I was living with a member of my family who was very close to the National Front, who talked in an overtly racist manner. I was surrounded by a certain number of people who had those kinds of ideas. And well, before that, I had been quite, I was rather sympathetic towards the anti-racist movement but I was not directly involved. But I reacted then very strongly, because I was afraid, I felt that everyone [...] was in the process of becoming like that [i.e. racist]. So, that's it. So, I went ... One morning I knocked on the door [laughs]. And I was received by [a member of the National Bureau] who talked to me a bit about the association and made me want to stay [...]. (Tape-recorded interview with Ariane, 3 December 1994)<sup>12</sup>

Another committee member, Christophe (a public-sector worker in his late 30s), explained his own involvement in SOS-Racisme as an alternative to membership of a political party and as a way of building a social network:

I've always had extreme difficulty in situating myself politically ... I have internal conflicts and it seemed to me that joining SOS-Racisme was a way of promoting my values ... which didn't bring me into conflict with political parties. In other words, I didn't have to take a stand for the Communist Party or the Socialist Party. [...] I returned to Paris in 1988 and [joining SOS-Racisme] was also a way for me to recreate a network of personal relations, with people who seemed to share my viewpoint on a political and a human level ... It was a way of meeting people too. (Tape-recorded interview with Christophe, 19 October 1994)<sup>13</sup>

The difference between membership of a political party, on the one hand, and of an association such as SOS-Racisme, on the other, was also important for Alain, a *soixante-huitard* who was the oldest activist in the committee:

I've always been involved in grassroots movements, neighbourhood things. I've never been able to join a political party ... I can't join in the sense that I would be obliged to take on the party's position and defend its positions even if I didn't agree with them. That, I couldn't do. It doesn't correspond with my state of mind to join a political party. (Tape-recorded interview with Alain, 22 November 1994)<sup>14</sup>

For Alain, as for Christophe, involvement in an association appeared attractive as it represented a less constraining or partisan form of political participation than membership of a political party.

The local committee of which I was a member, then, included people with quite different underlying personal and political projects. Different views also existed about the nature and role of the committee itself. To a large extent, these reflected a long-running debate within the association as a whole about whether it should concentrate on high-profile, national campaigns or alternatively focus on local-level, daily action against racism through legal advice and support. As Laurence explained:

After 1988, the association did a lot of soul-searching about whether it should try to carry out much more in-depth work in the suburban estates (*la banlieue*), a local kind of work, or whether it would continue with its first aim which was to be a vector for public opinion. And it's not the same kind of activist work. We don't have the strength to be *both* the vector of public opinion and relay all the national campaigns and devise campaigns ourselves *and* hold an advice session each week, follow up case files and so on. It's not possible. We can't do both. [...] Myself, and the people who were with me, were more favourable to the vector approach ... we wanted more to be a vector for public opinion. So, we didn't push at all for a local action.<sup>15</sup>

Other members of the committee, however, believed strongly that it should concentrate on action at the local level. At meetings, for example, Didier consistently argued in favour of 'regular interventions (*interventions régulières*)' locally, such as a weekly distribution of leaflets at street markets, which would enable the committee to raise its public profile and establish regular contact with the area's inhabitants 'on the ground (*sur le terrain*)'.

Nevertheless, most members agreed that being based in Paris, where the association's National Bureau and headquarters were situated, posed particular problems with respect to the committee's development and the

possibility of regular concrete action at a local level. Laurence provided a particularly clear assessment of the situation:

In Paris we're completely cornered. Because in the first place, the national body is there and we don't receive subsidies, they go to the national body. The committees don't have subsidies. And then, a committee is very small to cover an *arrondissement*... [...]. Also we, the Parisian activists, are liable to be exploited mercilessly by the National Bureau. That is, as soon as there's a national campaign it's the committees, the Parisians who have to distribute leaflets over Paris, put up posters over Paris, at the Gare du Nord, the Gare de Lyon. We are also the primary source of force for the National Bureau. Because otherwise the National Bureau is completely on its own. The National Bureau doesn't have activists as such, everyone is in a committee. So it's the Parisian committees [which are] the hub of activist reserves.<sup>16</sup>

For another member, Ariane, the issue was not just one of resources; it was also a question of the political autonomy and independence of the Parisian committees with respect to the National Bureau and the leadership:

The problem is that in Paris it's a bit difficult. Often the Parisian committees do nothing more than pass on the message from the national level. [...] One of the problems of ... There is a lack of independence on the part of the local committees in Paris with respect to the National Bureau. This is because the people who 'direct', in inverted commas, the Parisian committees, well it was like that two or three years ago in any case, they belong to the National Bureau. So the Parisian committees tend to be simply the driving belt for the national level. Whereas in the provinces ... it's more anchored in the local reality, they have their own mode of functioning.<sup>17</sup>

According to these two activists – and their views were widely shared, not only within the committee but also by other members of the association to whom I spoke at National Council meetings and similar events – Parisian committees confronted particular practical and political problems, which their provincial counterparts did not or to a much lesser extent.



In this section I have introduced some of the members of the local committee with which I was primarily involved during my fieldwork. As I have indicated, different political perspectives co-existed within the committee and although there was broad agreement about specific problems which it faced as a result of its Parisian location, opinion differed as to the nature and function of its activities. This raises the issue of the relationship between identity, difference and unity which has been the subject of considerable debate in recent social theory. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, I want to consider a number of points emerging from these more theoretical discussions.

## Identity, Difference and Unity

A useful way to begin unpacking 'identity' as a concept is by recognising that it pre-dates both contemporary (post-structuralist) theory and so-called identity politics movements. As Sharon Macdonald reminds us, for example, it is customarily used in mathematics and logic as 'a neutral synonym for sameness or equivalence' (1993: 7). Similarly, in philosophy the term 'identity' has traditionally referred both to 'what gives a thing or person its essential nature, i.e. its *eidos* or form, and thus its continuity through time, and second, what makes two things or two persons the same' (Zaretsky 1994: 199-200). David Hume's brief discussion 'Of Personal Identity' in *A Treatise on Human Nature* is, in this respect, exemplary in its definition of identity in terms of the criteria of continuity and invariability (see Hume 1874: 533-543). Contemporary theoretical discussion of the concept of identity continues, I believe, to revolve around ideas of essence and sameness, although these are now generally regarded as much more problematic. Most resistant to



change, in my view, has been a tendency to assume that identity necessarily implies some sort of homogeneity or unity.

Before I consider this point, however, I would like to turn briefly to the subject of identity politics, the politics of difference, and the relationship between them. The label identity politics is currently used as a shorthand way of referring to the various movements (feminist, gay liberation, African-American and those of other ethnic groups) which have emerged in late capitalist societies since 1968. For several commentators (Gitlin 1994; Zaretsky 1994) the rise of identity politics marked the collapse of the New Left and its attempt to construct a universalist politics which broke to some extent with traditional Marxism. In contrast, identity politics has been characterised as an assertion of 'difference' and of 'particularist identities' in opposition to a false universalism regarded as an instrument of hegemonic domination (see Zaretsky 1994: 198-199).

Although the wholesale assimilation of identity politics to a politics of difference can be disputed (see Best and Kellner 1991: 205-213), it is undeniable that post-sixties movements have, on occasion, articulated their demands in terms of difference. In France, for example, dominated groups such as women in the late 1960s, and North African 'immigrants' and their children in the early 1980s, have each claimed 'the right to be different (*le droit à la différence*)'. These groups have expressed a politics of difference in cultural terms, as an assertion of the legitimacy of non-hegemonic forms of cultural identity (see Vichniac 1991).

The long-term effectiveness of grounding political action in a notion of cultural difference has, however, been contested by the French feminist scholar Colette Guillaumin (1993, 1995). She argues that a demand for difference reflects the growing realisation on the part of dominated groups

that formal independence and equality have failed to produce real independence and equality. Claiming 'the right to be different', in her view, fails to address the reasons why previous struggles for legal equality have failed to produce the desired results. This would require a political analysis of the nature of the relationship between dominant and dominated groups. According to Guillaumin, the ultimate irony is that dominated groups are already defined as 'different' by the relations of exploitation and appropriation which produce their alienation. Consequently, demanding 'the right to be different' leaves structures of domination more or less intact. Guillaumin herself writes, as a member of a dominated group:

When we think difference, *we* think: 'We'll not harm you, so spare us'.  
When *they* think difference, they think: 'They'll stay in their place'.  
(1995: 248, emphases in original)

In another article, Guillaumin (1993) shows how the concept of cultural difference, which had been used to challenge various forms of racism in France during the late 1970s and early 1980s, was quickly adopted and modified by parties on the far right such as Le Pen's National Front (FN) to legitimize racist proposals (see also Chapter 6 of this thesis). Guillaumin here reveals the double-edged nature of a politics of (cultural) difference: while the concept can form the basis of a critique of domination, it is also liable to be appropriated by dominant groups in order to justify the exclusion of specific categories of the population.<sup>18</sup>

A more positive assessment of the potential contribution of the notion of 'difference' (in a slightly different sense) to progressive politics has, nevertheless, been made in Anglo-American feminist theory. In a review of recent debates, Michèle Barrett (1987) has distinguished three different uses of the concept—as 'experiential diversity', 'positional meaning' and 'sexual difference'. The first expresses a recognition of the fact that class and 'race'

are major axes of difference between women, and reflects the criticism voiced by working-class women and women of colour of the idea that all women share the same experience of oppression. As bell hooks (1994) has argued, however, the acknowledgement of differences among women has contributed to a strengthening of feminist politics as it has 'compelled feminist thinkers to problematize and theorize issues of solidarity, to recognize the interconnectedness of structures of domination, and to build a more inclusive movement' (1994: 102). In other words, a politics of difference raises important questions about the preconditions of political unity and action.

The nature of political solidarity and alliance in late capitalist societies has been a central theme in recent feminist debates and among those committed to radical politics more generally (see, for example, Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In the light of the issues raised by the identity politics movements discussed above, certain writers have emphasised the need to theorize identity and unity 'across' differences between political actors (Bottomley 1991: 210; Lorde [1984] 1992: 54) and to avoid a tendency to consider differences 'only one-at-a-time' (Mercer 1992: 425). Thus, if post-structuralist theory has been responsible for a shift of focus from a politics of identity to a politics of difference, as Zaretsky (1994: 200) has claimed, there now appears to be a move back in the direction of a concern with identity as a prerequisite of effective political action. In the final part of this section I will draw out the implications of this return to a politics of identity defined as unity.

The question of unity in feminist politics has been posed in a particularly acute way by Judith Butler in her discussion of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler asks, crucially, whether feminism requires a concept of 'women' as a stable and coherent category in

order to ground its politics. Black and working-class women have, she argues, already revealed the problematic nature of this assumption in their criticism of the idea that women share a common experience of oppression. For Butler, the point here is that 'the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed' (1990: 14). In other words, to attribute a single and universal 'identity' (here implying a notion of sameness) to women is to deny the role of 'race', class and ethnicity in also constituting their identities.

The conclusion which Butler draws from this argument is that feminism cannot appeal to the category 'women' as a universal subject which it can claim to represent. Recent post-structuralist theory, she argues, has shown us that the formation of a stable subject necessarily involves 'the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject' (1990: 6). Thus, the attempt to construct a feminist politics on the basis of a discrete 'identity' which would be common to all women is doomed to failure. According to Butler, the constitution of a feminist subject of this nature depends on a range of 'exclusionary practices' which preclude, as a feminist objective, the very possibility of extending political representation to all women.

Where does all this leave feminist politics, if an appeal to 'women' as a category or identity is regarded as 'exclusionary' and 'globalizing' (Butler 1990: 14)? For Butler the answer appears to lie in the creation of an 'open' coalitional politics which presupposes neither the unity nor the identity of women. Her reason for rejecting unity as a prerequisite of effective political action is hinted at by the following rhetorical question:

Does 'unity' set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim? (Butler 1990: 15)

I believe that a chain of equivalences is being set up here between unity, solidarity and identity which is deeply problematic and politically self-defeating. The question quoted above implies that feminist unity/solidarity (the two terms are almost treated as synonymous) as a political goal should be abandoned for the same reason that feminist action premised on the category 'women' was rejected; namely that both set normative constraints which ultimately exclude 'different' identities based, for example, on 'race', class and ethnicity.

I would suggest, however, that to conceptualise unity in this way is to confuse it with an interpretation of identity as sameness borrowed from mathematics and philosophy. Butler appears to believe that unity requires political actors to share, *prior* to their engagement in forms of collective action, 'some stable, unified, and agreed upon identity' (1990: 15). As I understand it, her point is that various types of intervention which might challenge hegemonic identities will be precluded if unity in this sense is considered as a precondition of effective political action. The open coalitions she advocates are presented as sites at which multiple and contingent identities converge or separate as the political need arises; unity, on the other hand, is described as 'obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure' (Butler 1990: 16).

An initial difficulty I have with this argument is in imagining what exactly an open coalition would look, sound and act like in practice. However, the underlying problem, in my view, is that while Butler is right to link unity to ideas of 'oneness' and 'sameness', it is not necessarily the case that this also

implies homogeneity. In other words, we may in fact be able to characterise the relationship between a set of political actors as solidarity or unity, without having thereby to accept the proposition that they share a basic identity. In short, a commitment to unity as a political objective should not be equated with spurious claims to universalism. An additional reason for resisting Butler's abandonment of unity as a political objective is suggested by Todd Gitlin's remark that at the moment the Left needs a concept of unity, if only to contest the idea of integration through a single market proposed by the Right (Gitlin 1994: 171).

A more sophisticated and progressive understanding of unity as a political concept has, however, been developed by Rosalind Brunt in an article on 'The Politics of Identity' which appeared in *Marxism Today* in October 1988. Brunt shares with Butler both an openness to post-structuralist theory and a concern with identifying the preconditions of effective political action, but differs in her evaluation of the place of unity in a radical political agenda. Recognising that in the contemporary world political identities and forms of resistance to power are multiple, she argues for 'a return to the principle valued by the old Bolsheviks steeped in dialectical philosophy: unity-in-difference' (Brunt 1989: 158). The comments which accompany this statement provide a clear indication of the conceptual distance separating Brunt's position on unity from that of Butler, and are therefore worth quoting at some length:

This [i.e. unity-in-difference] actually represents an advance on more recent thinking about 'broad democratic alliances' or 'rainbow coalitions' because it recognises the need for unity around common concerns whilst also understanding that the basis for unity is not homogeneity but a whole variety of heterogeneous, possibly antagonistic, maybe magnificently diverse, identities and circumstances. Unity-in-difference opens up the potential, witnessed in all the activities supporting the striking mining communities in



1984-85, that people can act in political solidarity in ways that do not subsume or deny real differences, divisions and diversities in the name of some abstract greater good that is predefined as *the* struggle for socialism. (Brunt 1989: 158. Cf. Lorde 1992: 51)

As is evident from this passage, Brunt is able to retain a commitment to unity as an essential component of a 'transformatory' political project because, unlike Butler, she distinguishes between unity and homogeneity.<sup>19</sup> For Brunt, solidarity does not imply identity, in the mathematical sense of sameness, but rather a dialectical relationship between identity (unity) and difference. Instead of leaving us to imagine a politics without unity, Brunt outlines a 'politics of identity' in which the nature of the relationship between heterogeneous identities and political unity is central.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an account of SOS-Racisme's organisational structure and also described the constellation of other bodies and organisations which have links with the association. An awareness of the different levels of SOS-Racisme's structure and the importance of specific political groupings within the association is crucial for the chapters which follow. I have attempted to illustrate these through a brief introduction to the perspectives of actors in the local committee in which I participated over the course of my fieldwork. Finally, I have examined recent debates about concepts of unity and identity, in order to begin to theorise the relationship between solidarity and difference within the committee.



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'L'association est la convention par laquelle deux ou plusieurs personnes mettent en commun, d'une façon permanente, leurs connaissances ou leur activité dans un but autre que de partager des bénéfices.'

<sup>2</sup> This is similar to the estimates I was given by members of the association several years earlier. Such a figure, however, undoubtedly includes committees with only a handful (or fewer) active members, and which effectively exist on paper only.

<sup>3</sup> SOS-Racisme held its first National Congress in Epinay-sur-Seine (Seine-Saint-Denis) in February 1986. A second Congress was held in Noisiel (Marne-la-Vallée) in April 1988, and a third in Longjumeau (Essonne) in April 1990. The latter coincided with the publication of the association's *Manifeste pour l'intégration* (SOS-Racisme 1990). SOS-Racisme's fourth Congress took place in Créteil (Val-de-Marne) from 9-11 July 1993, only a few weeks before I arrived in Paris to begin fieldwork.

<sup>4</sup> According to Fodé Sylla (1996a: 156), committees from 250 towns and cities are represented on the National Council. The National Council meetings held in Paris during the period of my fieldwork (July 1993 to December 1994) were generally attended by around 200-250 activists. The meetings were not, however, open only to National Council members (although only they could vote), and a significant number of those present were ordinary members of committees based in the Paris region (Ile-de-France). The inadequate representation of provincial committees at such meetings was repeatedly raised as an issue of internal democracy by activists based outside Paris.

<sup>5</sup> '[...] le Conseil national, il a le rôle d'un parlement. Et issue de ce conseil national il y a un Bureau national qui a un rôle d'exécutif, qui a aussi un rôle de décisions et un rôle d'exécutive. Mais en dernier ressort [...] le Conseil national, c'est l'instance qui est décisionnaire.' (Tape-recorded interview with Ariane, 3 December 1994)

'[...] le Bureau national, c'est l'équivalent du gouvernement, donc, qui prend des décisions, qui réfléchit pour prendre des décisions. [...] Et le Conseil national, c'est plutôt le parlement. C'est là où l'on met à l'ordre du jour des débats, et quand quelque chose est voté en Conseil national, le Conseil national est plus souverain que le BN [Bureau national], c'est lui qui ... Si la

décision est prise en Conseil national, elle peut pas être mise en cause au BN.' (Tape-recorded interview with Hélène, 10 November 1994)

<sup>6</sup> SOS-Racisme in Norway has created a useful Website containing a page with Hypertext links to the organisation's sites in seven other European countries, including SOS-Racisme France (<http://home.sol.no/~sosau/pekere.html>). For an overview of SOS-Racismo in Spain, see Ortun and Andreotta (1992). I am grateful to Sarah Gore for supplying me with this and other Spanish references. I would also like to thank Manishanker and Maria Fernandes Bhatt, who kindly provided me with copies of several publications by SOS-Racismo in Portugal.

<sup>7</sup> 'J'ai connu SOS-Racisme dès son entrée de l'intérieur. J'étais tout au cœur parce que j'étais copine avec les gens qui étaient parmi les gens qui ont fait SOS.'

<sup>8</sup> 'SOS-Racisme pour moi c'est une association, de mon point de vue de militante de la Gauche socialiste qui a comme but d'être un outil qui nous permet d'être en contact avec la population, avec des gens qui ne sont pas dans les partis, donc être en contact avec une partie de la société qui est dans le monde associatif.'

<sup>9</sup> 'On construisait cette association, parce qu'on voulait...nous, l'analyse, c'était de dire 'Il faut un pied en dehors du parti politique, et un pied à l'intérieur.' Donc il faut peser dans le parti, dans le PS notamment, et en même temps, il faut avoir un appareil de masse dehors, qui pousse. Et l'appareil de masse, c'est SOS-Racisme.'

<sup>10</sup> 'J'ai adhéré à SOS vers 1986, quoi. Alors pourquoi? Ben, parce qu'à l'époque j'étais dans un courant politique qui était la LCR. Et j'étais dans une tendance qui est en gros la tendance dans laquelle se retrouvait Gérard Filoche. Et cette tendance-là analysait SOS plutôt positivement. Et comme il y avait la montée des problèmes de racisme et de xénophobie, de plus en plus d'attaques contre les immigrés, si tu veux, à un moment SOS est apparu un peu comme l'organisation qui menait un combat contre ça et donc j'ai adhéré à ça quoi.'

<sup>11</sup> 'Pour moi, la construction d'un parti révolutionnaire, si tu veux, il y a une formation politique de comprendre l'Etat, de comprendre ce que c'est l'Etat bourgeois et tout ça. Donc, il y a ça qui est nécessaire, il faut donner cette éducation-là. Mais en même temps le rôle des militants révolutionnaires c'est aussi d'être des acteurs du mouvement de masse pour permettre aux ouvriers, aux jeunes, etc., de s'organiser, de marquer des points dans le rapport de forces avec l'ennemi, l'Etat et tout ça.'

<sup>12</sup> 'J'ai commencé à militer à SOS en 1990. A l'époque j'habitais chez quelqu'un de ma famille qui était très proche du Front national, qui tenait des discours ouvertement racistes et j'étais entourée d'un certain nombre de gens qui avaient ces idées-là. Et bon, avant ça j'étais assez, j'étais plutôt sympathisante dans le mouvement anti-raciste mais je ne m'y appliquais pas. Mais là j'ai eu une réaction très forte, parce que j'ai eu peur, j'avais l'impression que tout le monde [...] étaient en train de devenir comme ça. Donc voilà. Donc je suis allée ... Un matin j'ai frappé [rires] à la porte. Voilà. Et j'ai été reçue par [un membre du BN] qui m'a parlé un peu de l'association et qui m'a donné envie de rester [...].'

<sup>13</sup> 'J'ai toujours eu d'extrême difficulté à me situer au niveau politique ... J'avais des conflits internes et il me semblait qu'adhérer à SOS-Racisme, c'était une manière de promouvoir mes valeurs ...qui me mettait pas en conflit avec des parties politiques. Donc je n'avais pas à prendre parti pour le Parti communiste français ou pour le Parti socialiste. [...] Je revenais à Paris en 1988, et [adhérer à SOS-Racisme] c'était également une manière pour moi de me recréer un réseau de relations de personnes qui me semblait partager ma sensibilité à la fois politique et humaine ... C'était une manière de recontrer des gens également.'

<sup>14</sup> 'J'ai toujours été dans les mouvements de base quoi, les trucs de quartier. J'ai jamais pu adhérer à un parti politique ... je ne peux pas adhérer au sens où les discours du parti, je serais obligé de le prendre en charge, et si je ne suis pas d'accord, il faut quand même que je défende le discours du parti. Et ça, je ne peux pas. Ça ne correspond pas à mon état d'esprit d'adhérer à un parti politique.'

<sup>15</sup> 'Après 1988, l'association s'est beaucoup cherchée à savoir si elle devait essayer de faire un travail beaucoup plus en profondeur sur la banlieue, un travail très local ou si on devait continuer dans notre ambition première d'être un vecteur d'opinion. Et c'est pas le même type de travail militant. On n'a pas les forces pour faire les deux choses. Un comité ne peut pas faire *et* le vecteur d'opinion et être le relai de toutes les campagnes nationales et soi-même imaginer des campagnes et tenir une permanence toutes les semaines, suivre les dossiers et tout. C'est pas possible. On ne peut pas faire les deux. [...] Moi et les gens qui étaient avec moi, on était plutôt des gens du côté du vecteur ... on avait plus envie d'être vecteur d'opinion. Donc on n'a pas du tout poussé à faire un travail local.'

<sup>16</sup> 'A Paris, on est complètement coincé, quoi. Parce que déjà le national est là et on n'a pas de subventions, elles vont au national. Les comités n'ont pas de subventions. Et puis, un comité pour un arrondissement c'est tout petit ...[...] Puis nous, les militants parisiens, on est corvéable à merci aussi par le

Bureau national. C'est à dire que dès qu'il y a une campagne nationale, c'est les comités, les parisiens qui doivent coller Paris, qui doivent diffuser Paris, la Gare du Nord, la Gare de Lyon. On est aussi la première main d'œuvre du BN. Parce que le BN autrement il est tout seul. Il n'a pas de militants, le BN en tant que tel, tu sais, tout le monde est dans un comité. Donc c'est les comités parisiens [qui sont] des pôles de réserves de militants.'

<sup>17</sup> 'Le problème, c'est qu'à Paris c'est un peu difficile. Souvent les comités parisiens ne font que répercuter le national. [...] Un des problèmes de ... Il y a un manque d'indépendance des comités locaux parisiens par rapport au Bureau national. C'est que les gens qui dirigent entre guillemets les comités parisiens, enfin c'était le cas il y a deux ou trois ans, ils faisaient partie du Bureau national. Donc les comités parisiens avaient tendance à être seulement la courroie de transmission du national. Alors que dans la province ... c'est plus ancré dans la réalité locale, ils ont un fonctionnement bien à eux.'

<sup>18</sup> Of course this is not to hold anti-racist movements responsible for the growth of racism in recent years, as the New Right in France and Britain are fond of arguing.

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that Henrietta Moore has recently argued the same point, i.e. that identity and sameness need to be distinguished (see Moore 1994: 1).

<sup>20</sup> In this respect Brunt's discussion is strikingly similar to Knowles' and Mercer's interest in the formation and development of political 'constituencies' (see, Knowles and Mercer [1990] 1992). I am grateful to Jan Penrose for drawing my attention to their work.

## Chapter 3

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# Social Movements, Politics and Anthropological Research

Recent post-modernist positions notwithstanding, the rigorous definition of concepts and construction of 'objects of knowledge' by the analyst remains a precondition of knowledge production in anthropology and sociology as a scientific activity (Hamel 1999: 17-22). One aim of this chapter is to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework for the social scientific study of SOS-Racisme as part of the anti-racist movement in contemporary France. It does so by drawing on the work of a number of influential theorists of social movements and collective action. The first section describes the main theoretical 'schools' which have emerged in social movements research since the late 1960s and highlights recent attempts to synthesise elements from each in an 'integrated' theory of social movements. It then introduces and defines four key concepts from the field of social movements research: social movement, social movement organisation, collective identity and political opportunity structure. These are the analytical tools which will be used in subsequent chapters to explore different aspects of SOS-Racisme's republican anti-racism.

A review of the social movements literature reveals that social anthropologists have generally not played a prominent role in theoretical



and conceptual debates within this field of research. What has prevented anthropologists from engaging in a theoretically-informed analysis of contemporary social movements? Why is there an established sociology but not an anthropology of social movements? What does this absence tell us about the politics of anthropology and the anthropology of politics? The chapter's final section addresses these questions and considers a range of possible reasons for the 'invisibility' of social movements in anthropology. It is argued that anthropology's failure to study social movements is largely attributable to how political anthropology constructs its object, and particularly to the weakness of its concepts of politics and practice. The chapter's conclusion is, therefore, that the development of an anthropology of social movements will depend on a more general re-orientation of the discipline's approach to politics. This is the project to which the present thesis aims, in a modest way, to contribute.

## Theory and Concepts in Social Movements Research

Social movements research is a field of social scientific activity which has undergone rapid expansion over the past thirty years. During this period an impressive range of both theoretical and empirical work has been carried out on social movements and other forms of collective action. Recent studies have, for example, examined the connections between social movements and class, gender, culture, 'globalisation', political protest, and processes of democratisation and economic change in the South.<sup>1</sup> Although British social scientists have in the past tended to pay comparatively little attention to

social movements, there is some evidence that even this is now changing (see Bagguley 1997).

### *Theoretical Perspectives on Social Movements*

An important aspect of the development of the social movements field has undoubtedly been the emergence of clearly identifiable 'schools' or 'traditions' of research and analysis. This has stimulated debate and acted as a motor for theoretical and methodological innovation. As della Porta and Diani (1999: 3) have noted in their recent introduction to the social movements literature, four main approaches can currently be distinguished: collective behaviour, resource mobilisation, new social movements and political process. The collective behaviour approach can be traced back to Chicago School sociologists such as Herbert Blumer (1995), although it has subsequently been elaborated more fully by, notably, Ralph H. Turner (1969), Lewis M. Killian (Turner and Killian 1957) and Joseph R. Gusfield (1962, 1968). Drawing on symbolic interactionism, this perspective stresses above all the importance of collective action in producing and establishing new social norms. Social movements have thus been presented by collective behaviour theorists as relatively loosely-structured, informal initiators or opponents of change at the level of a society's value system (see Turner and Killian 1957: 3-19, 307-330; della Porta and Diani 1999: 4-7).

The second approach, resource mobilisation, has been developed predominantly in North America, where it has enjoyed considerable popularity.<sup>2</sup> Associated in particular with the organisational-entrepreneurial perspective of Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1977; Zald and McCarthy 1987) and the political conflict model elaborated by Charles Tilly (1978, 1986), the focus of resource mobilisation theories (RMT) is on the organisational structure of social movements and on



the rational or strategic logic of collective action. In the analysis of large-scale mobilisations, proponents of such theories insist on the central importance of 'objective' factors such as recruitment networks, links with pre-existing organisations and the availability of financial resources and professional expertise. An examination of the organisational structure of social movements is characteristically combined, in the resource mobilisation paradigm, with an emphasis on the logic of instrumental rationality which, it is claimed, governs the cost-benefit calculations performed by collective actors in pursuit of their interests and objectives (see Cohen 1985: 674-690; Jenkins 1983; Morris and Herring 1987: 157-171).

In contrast, the new social movements (NSMs) perspective places processes of identity formation and the creation of solidarity, rather than strategic interaction and organisational resources, at the centre of analysis. Jean Cohen has highlighted the work of Alain Touraine and other European sociologists as exemplifying this third 'identity-oriented' approach (Cohen 1985: 690-705). For NSMs theorists, contemporary forms of collective action involve the articulation of novel identities and conflict over cultural orientations through complex interactional processes which cannot be understood simply in terms of a logic of instrumental rationality. As Cohen indicates, the nature of the relationship between social movements and large-scale societal or cultural changes such as a transition to post-industrialism or post-modernity has also been a central issue in 'European' theories, notably in the work of Touraine (e.g. Touraine 1978).

The fourth approach currently dominant in the analysis of social movements is represented by 'political process' theories (della Porta and Diani 1999: 9-11). Those associated with this perspective are critical of previous resource mobilisation and new social movements theories for their 'neglect of politics'

(Tarrow 1988: 423), in particular their failure to examine the relationship between social movements and the state (Birnbaum 1993: 166). In contrast, political process theorists have highlighted the crucial role played by social movements in bringing about political change and the implementation of new policies, as well as the importance of the state in shaping forms of collective action. Most influentially, proponents of this approach have developed the concept of political opportunity structure as a way of analysing how political systems can either facilitate or block the emergence of social movements (see Tarrow 1994; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995, 1996)

Until the late 1980s, the four schools of social movement research and analysis which I have just described developed separately, with little cross-fertilisation or even mutual awareness. Surprisingly perhaps, it is only within the past decade that researchers have really begun to debate the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different perspectives. The outcome of this has been a widespread recognition that 'each of these approaches showed but one side of the coin' (Klandermans 1991: 17). As a result, the 1990s have witnessed an increasing number of attempts to link together elements from the collective behaviour, resource mobilisation, new social movements, and political process schools in an 'integrated' theory of social movements.<sup>3</sup>

Building on this work, I argue in the present thesis that an in-depth analysis of SOS-Racisme as part of the anti-racist movement in France requires a combination of the theoretical perspectives outlined above. In so doing, however, I recognise that there are important underlying differences in the ways these approaches conceptualise collective action (see Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 28-34). Recent formulations of 'a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements' (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996b: 2)

have, in my view, tended to downplay the extent to which their component elements are rooted in quite distinct, and even opposing, traditions of European and North American social science. In contrast, the present thesis should be viewed as a more modest attempt to develop a series of partial connections between the main theoretical approaches in social movements research introduced in this section while remaining firmly grounded in one particular 'tradition'. Its primary concern is with the processes of identity formation and solidarity construction to which European theorists have attached such significance, but at the same time it seeks to show the essential contribution of resource mobilisation and political process perspectives to the analysis of these phenomena. This is most apparent in Part III of the thesis where the impact of recruitment networks, organisational resources and political opportunity structures on the construction of collective identities is discussed in detail. The exploration of such interconnections is the intended contribution of the present thesis to the longer-term project of a fully integrated theory of social movements.

### *Social Movements and Social Movement Organisations*

One of the major obstacles to the development of a comprehensive theory of social movements remains the failure, on the part of many scholars, to define even basic notions with sufficient rigour and clarity. According to two recent critics of social movements theory, for example, the very concept of social movement itself is 'usually underdefined' in the literature (Jordan and Maloney 1997: 48), a view shared by some of the most prominent researchers in the field (e.g. Diani 1992: 2; Pizzorno 1990: 74). To avoid confusion, therefore, the main concepts which I intend to use to study SOS-Racisme as part of the anti-racist movement in France will now be introduced and defined. As will become apparent, a feature of the analytical framework I

propose to apply is that it brings together concepts – social movement organisation, collective identity and political opportunity structure – from resource mobilisation, new social movements and political process approaches respectively. The meaning of and relationship between these terms, along with the concept of 'social movement' itself, will be clarified here, and their use by other researchers to understand forms of collective action in contemporary France briefly reviewed.

In this thesis, I follow previous writers in the field in drawing an analytical distinction between *sociopolitical* and *sociocultural* types of social movement. Sociopolitical movements are those which are directed primarily towards changing the nature and distribution of political power within a society, while sociocultural movements tend to focus instead on effecting social change through a transformation of cultural codes and individual conduct. These labels provide a useful way of distinguishing *analytically* between broad types of movement in terms of their 'overall orientation', although of course most empirical movements are concerned to some extent with the relationship between 'politics' and 'culture' (Neidhardt and Rucht 1991: 450. See also Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998b: 2).

As an investigation into the politics of a section of the contemporary anti-racist movement in France, this thesis has tended to be influenced mainly by previous work on sociopolitical movements. The latter can be characterised more precisely as:

(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest. (della Porta and Diani 1999: 16)

This definition emphasises, firstly, that sociopolitical movements (and social movements more generally) are not organisations, like political parties or

interest groups, but rather are networks, composed of a diverse range of interconnected and interacting individuals, groups and organisations. It follows that 'a single organisation, whatever its dominant traits, is not a social movement', although it may form part of one if it displays the four characteristics listed above. Equally, however, individuals may participate regularly in social movement networks without belonging to a specific organisation. Only by distinguishing clearly between social movements, on the one hand, and social movement organisations (which may include parties and interest groups under certain conditions), on the other, can these points be understood (della Porta and Diani 1999: 16-9).<sup>4</sup>

A second feature of a sociopolitical (and a sociocultural) movement is the presence of a collective identity. This refers to the sense of belonging and the shared beliefs and values which, as I explain in greater detail below, movement participants develop in the course of interaction. A social movement's collective identity links together individuals and groups in a way which transcends specific organisational identities (although without destroying these) and provides a sense of continuity during periods of less intense activity. In so doing, it differentiates social movements not only from sects and interest groups, whose distinctiveness is limited to the organisational level, but also from isolated protest actions and types of network such as political coalitions, which tend to operate on a more instrumental basis and fail to produce identities which persist after a given initiative is over (see della Porta and Diani 1999: 17-20).

Thirdly, sociopolitical movements are characteristically engaged in political conflict with other actors over a range of issues. These may include the control and distribution of resources, and the meaning of core political values, as well as social changes of a more 'systemic' nature, involving the

transformation or defence of structural relationships of domination. The conflictual action of sociopolitical movements typically involves regular recourse to forms of public protest: in della Porta's and Diani's view, this is the fourth 'distinctive feature' of such movements and the one which perhaps most clearly separates them from sociocultural movements (1999: 15). Many commentators have regarded the use of 'non-conventional' or 'non-institutional' types of protest action (for example, street demonstrations, occupations or violence) as a characteristic of social movements, in contrast to more 'conventional' forms of participation such as voting or political lobbying (e.g. Duyvendak 1994: 50-1). As della Porta and Diani point out, however, the forms of public protest previously mentioned 'have become, to an increasing degree, part of the consolidated repertoire of collective action, at least in western democracies', making it somewhat inappropriate to continue referring to these as 'non-conventional' rather than, say, 'confrontational' (1999: 15).<sup>5</sup> It is the frequency with which public protest actions are initiated by social movement actors which is the essential issue here and not their supposed un-conventionality.

In my view, the definition of sociopolitical movements proposed by della Porta and Diani is sufficiently precise in nearly all respects to distinguish such movements from other forms of collective action. The only slight criticism I would make concerns the reference to social movements in general as 'informal interaction networks' (1999: 14, 16), since it is not clear to me how the term 'informal' is to be understood in this particular context.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the authors appear to mean that the structure of social movements is 'looser' (1999: 16) than that of organisations (although whether in the sense of being more diffuse or less hierarchical or both it is again difficult to judge). On the other hand, such an interpretation is apparently contradicted by an acknowledgement elsewhere that while networks may be



characterised by 'very loose and dispersed links' they can also be 'tightly clustered' (1999: 14). The implication here is that social movements may not always take the form of relatively unstructured or flexible networks; indeed, it is possible that, under certain conditions, they might adopt a fairly rigid or even hierarchical type of organisational structure. If this is the case – and the authors' own research tends to support such a hypothesis (see, for example, della Porta and Diani 1999: 116) – then there are strong grounds for rejecting the notion of an 'informal' network structure as a characteristic feature of all social movements and simply omitting the term from the definition quoted above.<sup>7</sup> I would argue that such a change removes a potential source of confusion without a loss of analytical focus, the remaining elements being sufficient to distinguish sociopolitical movements from organisations and other forms of collective action. With this minor modification, della Porta's and Diani's conceptualisation of sociopolitical movements will, therefore, be used as the point of departure for the following thesis.

In defining a sociopolitical movement in the way outlined above, della Porta and Diani draw attention to two further concepts which form part of the present study's conceptual framework. The first is the concept of *social movement organisation* (SMO), a notion which proponents of resource mobilisation theories in particular have used for many years to explore the organisational structure of social movements. According to McCarthy's and Zald's classic formulation, a social movement organisation is 'a complex, or formal, organisation which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals' (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218). In recent years, scholars from traditions other than resource mobilisation theory have also tended to adopt this general definition, and I will do likewise here.



Not all subsequent commentators, however, have followed McCarthy and Zald in asserting, more specifically, that the difference between SMOs and other types of formal organisation, such as interest groups, is that the former are less 'institutionalised' and have less 'stable ties' with governmental agencies (1977: 1218, note 8). In Kriesi's view, for example, the two distinctive characteristics of SMOs are that 'they mobilise their constituency for collective action and [that] they do so with a political goal, that is, to obtain some collective good (avoid some collective ill) from authorities' (1996: 152). He argues persuasively that the first distinguishes SMOs from interest groups and political parties, which tend to rely on the activity of an elite rather than the large-scale mobilisation of members, while the second highlights the fact that SMOs, in contrast to, say, internally-oriented self-help groups, are centrally concerned with political mobilisation and conflict (see Kriesi 1996: 152-3). I believe that Kriesi's criteria – the mobilisation of constituents and politically-oriented action – provide a more precise way of identifying the specificity of SMOs than those suggested by McCarthy and Zald, and my own discussion will be based primarily on his definition of the SMO concept.<sup>8</sup>

Social movement organisations are, therefore, an important element of the 'mobilising structures' of a social movement (McCarthy 1996: 141). But, as della Porta and Diani stressed in the passage discussed above, social movement organisations should not be confused with social movements. There are several different reasons for this. Firstly, unless a clear distinction is drawn between a social movement, on the one hand, and the various organisations which form part of it, on the other, there is always a danger of 'analytical confusion' (Diani 1992: 14) and of misplaced generalisation from specific organisations to the movement as a whole. Piven and Cloward, for example, have argued that explicit and well-defined projects of social

transformation – what they call 'articulated social change goals' – are features of formal social movement organisations and should not be equated with the eruptions of collective 'defiance' and 'insurgency' which serve to identify social movements (1979: 4-5). Jordan and Maloney (1997), on the other hand, have shown how studies of environmental movements often assume, mistakenly, that the goals and characteristics of active members of organisations such as Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace reflect those of people broadly sympathetic to environmental issues more generally. A similar conflation of a movement with one or more of the organisations linked to it has underpinned much of the discussion of anti-racism in contemporary France. The anti-racist movement in that country has thus frequently been reduced to or equated with SOS-Racisme, although mainly by its critics (e.g. Yonnet 1993).

There has also, however, been a tendency among other scholars to refer to SOS-Racisme itself as a '(social) movement' rather than as a social movement organisation.<sup>9</sup> The description of single organisations as social movements is widespread in the literature and probably reflects, at least in part, the looser use of the latter term in everyday speech. Nevertheless, it obscures the fact that social movements are not organisations, but rather are networks of interaction which may (or may not) include formally-structured organisations. According to della Porta and Diani, a failure to distinguish the two results in 'the application to social movement analysis of concepts borrowed from organisational theory, concepts that only partially fit the looser structure of social movements (1999: 16). Although the extent to which social movements can always be characterised in terms of a fluid or flexible structure is open to question, as I have already noted, the underlying point is still valid. A formal organisation may be a part of a social movement, but it does not in itself constitute one. As a result, social movement analysis cannot

be reduced to the investigation of specific organisations; it must instead examine wider networks of interaction between such organisations, less structured groups and individual participants.

This distinction between social movements and social movement organisations helps to clarify the nature and the limits of the present work. Strictly speaking, the object of investigation will not be a 'movement' as such (neither 'the anti-racist movement' in its entirety nor an organisation considered as 'a movement'), but rather an organisation which forms part of a wider movement. More specifically, the thesis is intended as a study of SOS-Racisme viewed as an SMO within the anti-racist movement in contemporary France.<sup>10</sup> Approaching SOS-Racisme in this way can be justified on a number of grounds. In terms of della Porta's and Diani's definition, SOS-Racisme is clearly part of an interaction network engaged in political conflict on the basis of related organisational and movement identities and with regular use of protest action. It is also centrally concerned with the mobilisation of its 'constituency' and politically-oriented action – Kriesi's two criteria of an SMO (see Parts II and III of this thesis). Finally, SOS-Racisme is characterised by a greater degree of formal organisation and structure than other sections of the anti-racist movement. It is an officially registered 'association' with legal competence and charitable status, under the terms of the 1901 Law which continues to form the basis of the freedom of association in France. This legislation subjects associations to a system of state regulation and, notably, includes the stipulation that they must have a formalised organisational structure comprising a 'management committee' and a 'bureau' (see Chapter 2).

The chapters which follow, then, provide a detailed analysis of one particular organisation within the anti-racist movement in contemporary

France, examining its modes of action as well as the types of link which bind it to other organisations, groups and unaffiliated individuals. In order to understand SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist SMO, however, I have not made extensive use of previous anthropological or sociological studies of organisations (e.g. Wright 1994). Instead, the argument which I wish to develop is that if, as della Porta and Diani have pointed out, it is a mistake to apply organisational theory and concepts to social movements (which are networks and not organisations), much may nevertheless be gained by bringing social movement theory and concepts to bear on analysis of specific (social movement) organisations. In my view, concepts such as collective identity and political opportunity structure, which have normally been formulated and used with respect to social movements as a whole, can also be valuable analytical tools for understanding processes at an organisational level. This is the one of the thesis's central contentions and will be illustrated more fully in Parts II and III below.

### *Collective Identities and Political Opportunity Structures*

If social movement and social movement organisation constitute the first pair of related concepts which will be used to analyse SOS-Racisme in this thesis, the concepts of collective identity and political opportunity structure form the second. The notion of collective identity was introduced earlier as a key component of della Porta's and Diani's definition of a social movement. In general terms, it refers to the shared set of beliefs and sense of belonging which link individuals and groups together in a social movement. The concept of collective identity has been associated mainly with the so-called 'New Social Movements'<sup>11</sup> theorists in Europe, and has traditionally found little favour among resource mobilisation theorists in the United States

although this may currently be in the process of changing (see Munck 1995: 22, note 6).

One of the most influential formulations of the concept of collective identity is to be found in the work of the Italian sociologist and psychologist Alberto Melucci, where it is defined in terms of a processual and constructionist approach to social movements. In *Nomads of the Present* (1989) and, more recently, in *Challenging Codes* (1996), Melucci argues against what he regards as the widespread tendency in social movements research to reify collective action by presupposing both its 'factual unity' and its 'collective dimension'. He maintains that not only have scholars often assumed that the collective phenomena (social movements, for example) they were investigating actually had a unitary or unified character rather than being simply 'concomitant forms of individual and group behaviour'; they have also treated the collective nature of the action in question as a 'given', rather than as something which it is necessary to explain (1996: 14-5). According to Melucci, an analysis which is premised on these assumptions takes for granted the existence of a social movement as a relatively unified collective actor, deflecting attention away from the ways in which collective action is produced and sustained. He proposes that collective phenomena such as social movements should be considered instead as social constructions, as 'the result of multiple processes that favour or impede the formation and maintenance of the cognitive frameworks and the systems of relationships necessary for action' (1988: 331). A social movement is not a homogeneous entity or 'unified subject', he insists, but rather 'a composite action system' involving a diverse range of interactive processes, orientations to action and types of relationship (1989: 28).

In Melucci's view, this processual and constructionist approach to collective action avoids the reification of social movements and their unity which has characterised many previous studies. It emphasises the plural and heterogeneous nature of social movements and suggests that whatever unity they possess must be understood as the fragile and probably transitory outcome of compromise and the negotiation of shared meanings among a range of actors. The researcher can no longer simply assume or take for granted this unity; instead, the challenge is to explain how it is produced. As a result, identification of the processes underlying the construction of collective action, the production of unity and the involvement of individuals becomes an essential task for social movements research (see Melucci 1989: 20).

These processes include, crucially, the formation and maintenance of a collective identity by movement participants. Melucci insists that neither 'objective conditions' (common position in the class structure, for example) nor the 'dysfunctions' of the social system are sufficient to explain the emergence of collective identities. He argues that a collective identity is not a simple reflection of underlying structural conditions but is rather:

an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place. By 'interactive and shared' [he continues] I mean a definition that must be conceived as a process because it is constructed and negotiated through a repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals (or groups). (Melucci 1995a: 44)

The construction of a collective identity is, in other words, a process involving three related aspects: the elaboration of shared understandings of the objectives, strategies and context of the movement's or group's action by its members through negotiation and discussion; the development of



relationships between actors enabling them to formulate a sense of 'we' or common identity through collective action and decision-making; and the emotional investment of each member in relationships with others perceived as sharing her/his interests or aspirations (see also Melucci 1989: 35).

A valuable distinction which Melucci draws in his discussion of collective identity is between visibility and latency as the contrasting 'poles' of collective action (1989: 70-71). He argues that 'visible' forms of social movement activity, such as demonstrations or other public mobilisations, do not constitute the totality of collective action. Rather, the mobilisation of a social movement depends on the construction of a collective identity and the production of alternative or conflictual meanings by actors through their participation in networks which are 'hidden' or 'submerged' in everyday life. Melucci describes such networks as 'cultural laboratories' in which 'experiments are conducted on the existing relations of power' through a reinterpretation of reality and a redefinition of the limits of politics (1989: 208). These networks of social relations and the negotiation of shared meanings conducted within them together constitute the conditions of possibility of subsequent mobilisations. It is in this respect that collective identity formation during a movement's 'latency' phases can itself be considered as the product of collective action as well as the basis for future, visible forms of activity.

The constructionist approach to social movements developed by Melucci conceptualises collective identity, in other words, as the process whereby actors develop a shared understanding of the means, ends and context or environment of their action (Melucci 1988: 332-3). In this thesis, I follow Melucci in considering collective identity formation in processual terms and in distinguishing between visible and latent phases of collective action.

However, where Melucci formulates these points in relation to a social movement as a whole, my argument is that similar processes occur – and can be studied – at the level of a social movement organisation such as SOS-Racisme.<sup>12</sup> The chapters in Parts II and III of this thesis are, in fact, centrally concerned with how members of SOS-Racisme negotiated and expressed a sense of collective identity and distinctiveness within a broader anti-racist movement. The relationship between organisational and movement identities and the interplay between periods of latency and visibility (at an organisational level) are two of the key issues which I propose to address in my discussion.

As Melucci explains, an important aspect of the construction of a collective identity by participants in a social movement is the negotiation of a common or shared understanding of the wider context of their action. This includes evaluating the extent to which, at specific times and places, the political process can be influenced by collective action. One way in which social scientists have attempted to analyse and compare the political 'environment' for social movement action is through the concept of political opportunity structure. An early version of the notion was presented by Eisinger (1973) in his discussion of urban protest in the United States, and it has subsequently been developed and refined by theorists working mainly within the 'political process' tradition of social movements research (e.g. Kitschelt 1986). As Gamson and Meyer (1996) have recently warned, however, the concept has been defined in so many different ways that it 'threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action' (1996: 275). In an attempt to clarify how 'political opportunity structure' will be interpreted in this thesis, three of the main problems with previous uses of the concept will now be discussed.

A first difficulty with the concept is that scholars have defined it in terms of a wide range of different variables. Tarrow (1994: 85-9), for example, has distinguished the following four 'dimensions' of the political opportunity structure: the extent to which access to formal political participation is open or closed; the stability or instability of ruling political alignments; the availability of influential allies; and the existence of divisions within and between elite groups. Changes in these aspects of the political and institutional context can, he suggests, create opportunities for social movements to engage in collective action. Kriesi (1995) and his colleagues (Kriesi et al 1995; Duyvendak 1994), on the other hand, have used the notion to refer to three key elements: the formal institutional structure of a state, including the degree of centralisation and concentration of power; the procedures and strategies employed by authorities to exclude or integrate external demands; and the configuration of power within and between political parties. Piven and Cloward have argued instead that the crucial aspects of 'the institutional context' which structure protest are the electoral system and social patterns and roles (see Piven and Cloward 1979: 14-37).

Underlying such variation is often a difference of emphasis on 'stable' as opposed to 'volatile' elements of political opportunity structures. As Gamson and Meyer have pointed out, certain aspects of the political and institutional context are relatively fixed and, in normal circumstances, are beyond the control of social movements: these include the institutional structure of the state and the nature of the party and electoral systems. Other aspects, however, are more dynamic and volatile and play an essential role in generating 'windows of opportunity' for specific mobilisations: policy changes and shifts in the balance of power between elites or political parties could be considered under this second category. Formulations of the political opportunity concept, such as those outlined above, have generally included

elements of both types, although not always with equal weighting (see Gamson and Meyer 1996: 277-9).

A second problem concerns the failure of many scholars to acknowledge that political opportunities are not simply 'objective' features of the political and institutional context but also have a 'subjective' dimension. A good example of this is Kriesi's restriction of the concept of political opportunity structure to 'those aspects of a political system that determine movement development *independently of the purposive action of the actors involved*' (Kriesi 1995: 168, my emphases). While it is undeniable that social movement action is objectively structured and conditioned by 'stable' elements of the political and institutional context such as the nature of the party and electoral systems, as Kriesi suggests, political opportunities are also interpreted and debated (and sometimes even created) by movement actors themselves. This is precisely the point which Melucci makes in his discussion of collective identity formation. He describes it as a process in which movement participants evaluate not only the means and ends available to them but also the extent to which the social and political context is or may become favourable to their action. How actors assess a potential political opportunity – or indeed if they perceive it as such in the first place – can, therefore, significantly affect its impact on their action. It follows that Kriesi's approach is too restrictive: both objective *and* subjective components of political opportunities, structure *and* agency, need to be taken into account (see Tarrow 1988: 430; Gamson and Meyer 1996: 283).

Thirdly, scholars have tended to focus on the ways in which the political opportunity structure constrains or enables the action of a movement generally; much less attention has been given to the particular and potentially unequal effects of changes in this structure on the different

SMOs, other groups and individuals which together constitute a movement as an interaction network. As Gamson and Meyer have pointed out, there is consequently a danger that '[v]alid statements about changes in movement opportunity as a whole may hide important changes in relative opportunity' (1996: 284). I would argue, further, that it is important analytically not to confuse or equate opportunities for a social movement in general with those for a specific organisation or group which happens to form part of it. This is one of the problems with Duyvendak's otherwise incisive analysis of the relationship between successive Socialist governments and social movements in France during the 1980s (Duyvendak 1994).

Duyvendak maintains that when a progressive government is in power in France it can choose to promote certain social movements and in such cases 'these *movements* will be among the *organisations* sponsored by the government and whose demands could even be granted force of law' (1994: 100, my emphases).<sup>13</sup> Reducing movements to organisations in this way, however, obscures the fact that governments may attempt to influence the overall direction of a movement by aiding or even creating individual SMOs, with the result that other (perhaps more radical) organisations or groups within the movement are disadvantaged or marginalised. To take a specific example, I would argue that Duyvendak is mistaken when he implies that 'the anti-racist movement' as a whole received 'considerable support (*un soutien important*)' from the governing Socialist Party in France during the 1980s (1994: 142). This assumes that both the anti-racist movement and the Socialist Party are unitary and homogeneous entities and that a simple and direct relationship can be traced between them. In reality, the early 1980s witnessed an attempt by rival currents within the Socialist Party (grouped around Laurent Fabius and Lionel Jospin) to increase their power and influence by assisting and even launching competing anti-racist

organisations (SOS-Racisme and France-Plus respectively). Other anti-racist and 'Beur' organisations did not enjoy an equivalent level of official support (see Geisser 1997: 168-70 and Part II of this thesis). It is crucial, therefore, to distinguish clearly between, on the one hand, those political opportunities which exist for a social movement as a whole and, on the other, those which may only be available to specific organisations, individuals or groups within it.

The use of the concept of political opportunity structure in the present thesis attempts to avoid these three problems. I will follow Kriesi in defining the concept in terms of three key variables: the formal institutional structure of the state, the dominant procedures and strategies employed by the authorities in the face of external demands, and the configuration of political power. The first two are relatively stable aspects of the political system whereas the third is more dynamic and volatile. As I show in subsequent chapters, it is change in the balance of political power (both within and between political parties) which has been the most significant of these factors in constraining and enabling the action of SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist organisation since the mid-1980s. In line with Gamson and Meyer (1996: 285), however, I place greater emphasis than Kriesi does on the role of the media in validating whole movements or specific SMOs as 'credible' political agents (see Part II). I also differ from Kriesi in arguing that both the objective and the subjective dimensions of political opportunities must be examined, although I will tend to devote more attention to the second of these; how members of SOS-Racisme interpreted and debated the political opportunities available to them during 1993-94 will be the main focus of my discussion (see Chapters 8 and 9). Finally, and this should be obvious from the preceding comments, I intend to use the concept of political opportunity structure to analyse the emergence and subsequent development of one particular SMO,



SOS-Racisme, rather than the evolution of the anti-racist movement more generally. Although originally defined and most commonly considered in relation to a social movement as a whole (as in the case of the concept of collective identity), the notion of political opportunity structure can, I will suggest, equally help to explain variations in the fortunes of specific SMOs.

## Toward an Anthropology of Social Movements

The theoretical and conceptual debates which I have reviewed in the previous section are an important indication of the remarkable growth of social movements research as a field of social scientific inquiry over the past three decades. As Arturo Escobar has perceptively observed, however, '[a]nthropologists have been largely absent from this extremely active and engaging trend' (1992a: 396), in marked contrast to their colleagues in sociology, political science, women's studies and history. Writing in the early 1990s, Escobar lamented the 'invisibility' of social movements in anthropology and the discipline's failure to contribute significantly to debates about contemporary forms of collective action. Nearly a decade later, there is little evidence to suggest that Escobar's call for anthropologists to 'pay serious attention' (1992a: 396) to social movements has been heeded. Although some anthropologists (e.g. Bergendorff 1998; Nash 1992) have recently begun to explore this topic, they have generally failed to relate their work to the theoretical debates outlined above.<sup>14</sup> Even the present trend towards a 'cultural analysis' (Johnston and Klandermans 1995b) of social movements appears to be passing anthropologists by as well as bypassing anthropology.<sup>15</sup>

## *The 'Invisibility' of Social Movements in Anthropology*

Given the steady growth of interest in social movements within the social sciences generally, it is important to examine the reasons why anthropologists have made such a limited contribution to our knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon. After all, there is no shortage of anthropological work on millenarian and other religious movements. What, then, has prevented anthropologists from engaging in a theoretically-informed analysis of contemporary sociopolitical and sociocultural movements? Why is there an established sociology but not an anthropology of social movements? These are the questions I will attempt to answer in the next two subsections. In the article cited above, Escobar explains the invisibility of social movements in anthropology in terms of five different factors and I will use these to structure the first part of my own discussion here. Following Escobar I argue that anthropology's failure to study social movements is partly attributable to the weakness of its concepts of politics and practice. Nevertheless, I go on to suggest in the chapter's final subsection that recent debates about the future of political anthropology indicate possible ways forward for those currently involved in social movements research.

According to Escobar (1992a), a convergence of five factors has been responsible for the 'invisibility' of social movements in anthropology.<sup>16</sup> The first of these is the prominence of issues relating to textuality and representation in anglophone anthropology during the 1980s and early 1990s. One of the first indications of anthropology's 'literary turn' (Scholte 1987) was the publication of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), an edited collection subtitled 'The Poetics and Politics of Anthropology'. As many critics have since argued, however, the essays contained in this

volume tended to devote considerably more attention to textual or literary questions than to the subject of politics as such (Scholte 1987; Spencer 1989; Mascia-Lees et al 1989). In particular, most of the contributors approached issues of power and domination in terms of the construction of the *textual* authority of the ethnographer rather than through an examination of, for example, the material basis of ethnographic production or the politics of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Escobar claims that this led to a focus in subsequent debates on the politics of representation. While not denying the importance of this development, he contends that it has produced a rather narrow definition of 'the political arena' which has directed attention away from issues such as collective political practice and the relationship of contemporary social movements to political processes (Escobar 1992a: 398, 401).

An inadequate conceptualisation of practice is, Escobar maintains, a second factor contributing to the absence of social anthropologists from current debates on social movements. He accepts Sherry Ortner's (1984) assertion that the concept of practice has become increasingly important in anthropology since the 1960s. One aspect of this is a greater awareness of the need to examine the role of everyday as well as ritualistic practices in the construction and reproduction of social and cultural formations (a point which had, of course, already been emphasised by Malinowski (1922: 24) in his comments on 'the imponderabilia of everyday life'). Escobar claims, however, that social anthropology as a discipline has few theoretical or conceptual resources with which to study collective political action and its part in creating the world(s) in which we live. The collective production of social life by social actors, he argues, has been rendered invisible in anthropology by the prevalence of 'an individual-oriented notion of practice' (Escobar 1992a: 401). A more satisfactory conceptualisation of practice which recognises its collective dimension can, he proposes, be derived from the

work of de Certeau and theorists of popular culture such as John Fiske (see Escobar 1992a: 409; 1992b: 74-76).<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, Escobar states that 'divisions of labour within the academy' (1992a: 401) have also prevented a recognition of social movements as a topic of anthropological inquiry. There is no further elaboration of this comment, however, and its precise meaning is unclear. Nevertheless, a possible indication is provided by Escobar's argument later in the article that social movements are 'relevant' to anthropology because they involve conflict over *cultural* meanings as well as social and economic resources (1992a: 412). This implies that in the past anthropologists have regarded social movements for the most part as socio-economic struggles and, as a result, of interest primarily to sociologists and political scientists. Although it must be emphasised that Escobar does not develop the point explicitly, his view appears to be that a distinction (or 'division of labour') between anthropology as the study of 'culture' and sociology as the study of 'society' may previously have functioned to inhibit anthropological research on social movements.<sup>19</sup>

A fourth factor contributing to the paucity of anthropological research on social movements is, in Escobar's view, academic anthropology's detachment from the interests and concerns of the wider society. Escobar argues that the discipline operates within an epistemology ('a western will to knowledge') which renders it 'abstract, disembodied and disembedded from popular social contexts, [and] accountable primarily to the academy' (1992a: 419). In other words, anthropology's ways of constituting and knowing social reality are the product of a particular historical process (Western modernity) which has characteristically involved the separation of academic from other social practices. These 'modes of knowledge' have defined anthropology as an

academic or scientific discipline, Escobar acknowledges, but they have also '[made] unlikely certain styles of research' (Escobar 1992a: 401).<sup>20</sup>

The marginal place occupied by action research within the social sciences is a good illustration of this last point. As Gerrit Huizer has indicated, the adherence of many researchers to a conception of objectivity understood as 'non-involvement' has frequently led to an eschewal of action research as well as a more widespread reluctance to study social conflict at all. Many social scientists have perceived action research as necessitating a personal commitment or partisan involvement which would undermine the scientific or objective status of their work (Huizer 1979: 396-406; Lopate 1979). The implication of Escobar's argument is that similar concerns may also have prevented anthropologists from studying social movements.<sup>21</sup>

The final factor adduced by Escobar to explain the scarcity of anthropological research on social movements is 'the decline of collective action' (1992a: 401) in society – in this case the United States – during the 1980s. To be fair, Escobar is cautious about asserting too direct a correspondence between waves of social movement activity and the degree of academic interest in the phenomenon. Nevertheless, given that social movements research has 'flourished' (Escobar 1992a: 396) in Latin America, Western Europe *and* North America over the past twenty years, as I have already indicated, it is still necessary to ask why social anthropologists in these places have been so reluctant to enter the debates. In other words, even if current levels of collective action are comparatively low (which is in fact debatable, see Tarrow 1994), this does not explain the specific absence of *social anthropologists* from social movements research and analysis.

To my knowledge, Escobar's work represents the first sustained attempt to identify the underlying causes of the invisibility of social movements in

contemporary anthropology. Although not all of the five 'factors' which he discusses are entirely convincing (for the reasons suggested above), there is no doubt that he raises fundamental questions about the current state of the discipline and, in particular, the adequacy of its concepts of politics and practice. It is disappointing, therefore, that the line of argument which he develops (Escobar 1992a and b; Escobar and Alvarez 1992b; Alvarez and Escobar 1992) has subsequently attracted little (if any) critical comment from other anthropologists.<sup>22</sup> Escobar's programmatic discussion of the relevance of social movements theory and research for anthropology (Escobar 1992a: 402-412) has not prompted a significant debate within the discipline. Similarly, the key conceptual and theoretical issues which he highlights have not been addressed further, even by those anthropologists who have recently turned their attention to the empirical investigation of social movements.

The theoretical and methodological foundations for an anthropology of social movements thus remain to be established. The present thesis is intended as a contribution to such an enterprise, following to a large extent the intellectual agenda set out by Escobar in the articles already mentioned. Rather than pursue an assessment of the five factors in terms of which Escobar himself explains the absence of social movements in anthropology, however, I would like to approach the question from a slightly different angle. As noted earlier, certain aspects of Escobar's analysis appear to apply more to anthropology as it has developed in the United States than to its European branches. This suggests that it may be instructive to 'localise' the problem by considering the possible reasons for the failure of anthropologists based in Britain to study social movements. It is to this issue which I want now to turn.



## *Re-Orienting the Anthropological Study of Politics*

The importance of examining social movements research (or the lack of it) in a national context has been emphasised by the sociologist Paul Bagguley in a recent article (Bagguley 1997). The initial point which he makes is that there is no sociology of social movements in Britain equivalent to that which has emerged in the US and in other European countries such as France, Germany and Italy. While interest in the topic currently appears to be growing in this country, Bagguley maintains that:

In the early 1990s the area [of social movements] was neither established as a topic of theoretical work, funded empirical research nor teaching within Britain. There is no clearly identifiable 'school' of British social movement research and analysis [...]. (Bagguley 1997: 149)<sup>23</sup>

As Bagguley acknowledges, the absence of a sociology of social movements in Britain is surprising for a number of reasons. In the first place, comparable 'sub-disciplinary areas' such as women's studies have developed within British sociology in conjunction with the other social sciences. Secondly, the tradition of sociological theory in Britain is 'exceptionally vigorous' as a result of its exposure to both North American and European currents of thought. Thirdly, levels of social movement activity in this country were high compared to the US, West Germany and Italy in the 1960s and 1970s, the period when the social movement field began to flourish elsewhere (Bagguley 1997: 151-2).

According to Bagguley, the limited contribution of British sociologists to social movements analysis is related to the dominance of a 'class-theoretical paradigm' in political sociology during the late 1960s and 1970s. He claims that the emergence of a sociology of social movements in Britain was effectively 'blocked' by the ascendancy of a theoretical model which

interpreted such phenomena primarily as the expression of diverse class interests. The social movements which arose during the 1960s, for example, tended to be regarded simply as 'middle class movements'. Bagguley suggests that this 'class-reductionist political sociology' prevented British sociologists from asking 'the right questions'. The complex meaning of contemporary forms of collective action was obscured and social movements analysis remained marginal to the development of the discipline as a whole. As a result, the theoretical schools and research centres which provided an intellectual and institutional space for the study of social movements in the US and Europe were never established in Britain (Bagguley 1997: 149-151).

The argument developed by Bagguley, therefore, is that the class-theoretical approach of political sociology in Britain from the 1960s onwards became a major obstacle to the expansion of social movements research. This is an important thesis, which in itself would merit more detailed examination. However, the particular question which interests me here is whether a similar line of reasoning can help to explain the absence of an anthropology (as opposed to a sociology) of social movements in Britain. As I have already indicated, Bagguley's suggestion is that the class paradigm which once dominated British political sociology had the effect of marginalising the sociology of social movements. In a parallel fashion, I want now to consider the possibility that the failure of anthropologists in this country to make a significant contribution to social movements analysis is attributable, at least in part, to the shortcomings of post-war political anthropology. Recent critiques of the subdiscipline of political anthropology, I will argue, echo many of the points raised by Escobar with respect to social movements research and offer a way out of the current impasse.

For the purposes of the present discussion, one of the most useful commentaries on the development of political anthropology in Britain since the 1940s is to be found in an essay by Jonathan Spencer on 'Post-Colonialism and the Political Imagination' (1997). As Spencer explains, the thirty years which followed the publication of *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940) can be viewed, in retrospect, as the 'heyday' of political anthropology in this country. Since the 1970s, in contrast, the subdiscipline has 'remained obstinately out of fashion' (Spencer 1997: 1), in spite of growing wider interest in such topics as power, post-colonialism and nationalism. In order to explain the continuing unpopularity of political anthropology, Spencer maintains that it is necessary to re-examine the ways in which anthropologists have traditionally conceptualised the political. He suggests that anthropological approaches to politics have tended to be underpinned by a number of problematic assumptions. These have ultimately contributed to the decline of political anthropology (Spencer 1997: 3).<sup>24</sup>

The account of 'anthropology's problems with politics' presented by Spencer (1997: 3) is an important attempt to prepare the ground for the task of reorienting the anthropological study of politics generally in more productive directions. However, his argument can also be used to throw light on the more specific question of the absence of social movements in anthropology. In other words, the critique of political anthropology which he outlines can help to explain why the analysis of social movements has not figured prominently on the discipline's agenda. Spencer makes two points which are particularly relevant in this regard. Firstly, he shows how political anthropology, from Fortes and Evans-Pritchard to Leach and Bailey, was constructed on the basis of a radical distinction between the political and the cultural. The functionalist comparison of political structures developed by

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, for example, required these to be 'stripped of their cultural idiom' (quoted in Spencer 1997: 4). The subsequent emergence of structuralism did not significantly alter this emphasis on the complete separation of the two categories. As Spencer notes, the end result was an extremely narrow understanding of politics itself:

Where others spoke of cosmologies and modes of thought, ritual and symbol, unconscious structures and implicit meanings, political anthropology became determinedly unexotic, anti-cultural and dull. By 1970 all the richness and complexity of actually existing politics had been reduced by anthropologists to the micro-study of instrumental behaviour ... Political anthropology, so conceived, was the subdiscipline that died of boredom. (Spencer 1997: 5)

Writing in 1967, the French anthropologist Georges Balandier had already drawn attention to the limitations of both functionalist and structuralist approaches within political anthropology. Although not referring explicitly to the importance of culture, he nevertheless criticised formalist models for denying the dynamism, instability and antagonistic nature of political systems. Presaging the turn of events later discussed by Spencer, he warned that the dominant types of analysis then employed by political anthropologists would lead only to intellectual 'dead ends (*voies sans issue*)' (Balandier 1995: 224).

Returning to the main theme of this subsection, I would suggest that classic political anthropology's adherence to a rigid distinction between the political and the cultural may have produced an inability to comprehend the nature of post-war social movements. As Escobar has emphasised, there is a widespread view among theorists in the other social sciences that 'social movements cannot be understood independently of culture' (Escobar 1992a: 405). The sociologist Alberto Melucci, for example, argues that today's social movements are engaged in conflict over 'symbolic resources' (1985; 1989: 20),

while Touraine maintains that actors are struggling to (re-)define society's 'great cultural orientations' (Touraine 1978: 42). Such writers have thus drawn attention to the fact that the movements which emerged during the 1960s (civil rights, feminism, ecology, gay liberation) were concerned not only with social and economic transformation but also with culture and identity.<sup>25</sup> This frequently involved a redrawing of the boundaries of politics itself and the creation of new forms of political practice (Offe 1985). With its tendency to abstract politics from culture, however, contemporary anthropology would have been ill-equipped to appreciate the significance of these developments.

The second point I want to consider from Spencer's article is his contention that anthropological studies of politics have typically excluded the empirical investigation of large-scale institutions such as the state and political parties. According to Spencer, there has been an 'unspoken assumption that modern political institutions are either pre-eminently rational and transparent, or anthropologically irrelevant and intellectually unchallenging' (1997: 3). Using one of Geertz's essays in comparative politics (Geertz 1973) as an example, he argues that anthropologists have tended implicitly to regard 'the state' and 'civil society' as relatively unproblematic phenomena which do not require investigation in their own right.<sup>26</sup> Spencer suggests that surprisingly little attention has, as a result, been devoted to the structure and workings of the post-colonial nation-state, even in more recent work on nationalism (see Spencer 1997: 6-7; Gupta 1995: 376).

In a passage which echoes Escobar's critique of the literary turn, Spencer continues that a concern with the state or political institutions more generally has also been missing in the post-*Writing Culture* literature on 'power'. Associating this with the 'theoretical looseness' with which the

terms 'politics' and 'power' have been used in recent debates, he poses the following question:

...if everything is 'political', what word can we use to mark out that special area of life which people themselves refer to as 'politics' (...)? The problem is real enough because, for whatever reason, mass politics – parties, elections, the state [and social movements?] – has been more often than not absent from this literature. (Spencer 1997: 13, one reference omitted)

The upsurge of interest in 'power' within anthropology over the past decade has not, in other words, led to a greater emphasis on the examination of what Spencer refers to as 'the institutional context of modern politics' (1997: 3). If anything, there is a danger that the inflation of the meaning of the political will hinder the future development of this type of analysis.

The key point to emerge from the above comments is that the anthropological study of mass politics, and particularly its institutional aspects, is still at an embryonic stage. As noted earlier, the argument advanced by Spencer is that anthropologists have tended to treat the ritualistic or symbolic dimensions of post-colonial politics as their primary concern; apparently more 'rational' elements, such as the state itself, have attracted considerably less attention. While this is undoubtedly one factor, I suspect that another may simply have been a perception (in my opinion, erroneous) that traditional anthropological methods were inappropriate for the investigation of these phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the precise reasons for the discipline's failure to address issues of mass politics, I would suggest that the invisibility of social movements in anthropology can be viewed as an example of this wider problem. Although social movements are not strictly speaking part of the formal political system, they nevertheless interact in complex ways with the state and political parties, and play a crucial role in shaping and mobilising public opinion (Jenkins and Klandermans 1995;



Neveu 1996: 17-20). Given that anthropologists have devoted relatively little attention to the state, parties and elections, as Spencer has indicated, it is then perhaps not entirely surprising that they have also rarely investigated social movements.<sup>28</sup>

In this subsection I have suggested that the absence of an anthropology of social movements can be attributed, at least in part, to the way in which post-war political anthropologists in Britain have constructed their object. As Spencer has argued, classical political anthropology tended both to define politics in opposition to culture, and to ignore the institutional or organisational aspects of mass politics. My contention is that one effect of this narrow conception of politics was to deflect anthropologists' attention away from social movements, at a time when interest in the topic was increasing within other social science subjects. Although issues of power and resistance subsequently came to occupy a central place in anthropological debate during the 1980s, I would argue (with Escobar and Spencer) that definitions of the political sphere remained problematic, and served indirectly to perpetuate the marginalisation of social movements research within the discipline.

The implication of the preceding argument is that the future development of an anthropology of social movements in this country (and elsewhere) will depend on a more general transformation of the subdiscipline of political anthropology. One way forward would be for anthropologists to display greater sensitivity to what Spencer has termed 'the empirical unpredictability' (1997: 9) of the political, by which he means the diverse and sometimes unexpected (to the anthropologist) types of behaviour which people themselves understand as 'politics'.<sup>29</sup> These may well include participation in a social movement organisation, as the material discussed in

Part III reveals. A political anthropology seriously committed to understanding the full range of action which people describe as 'political' will not, therefore, be able to ignore social movements and their relationship with political parties and the state.

However, it is also the case that anthropologists involved in researching social movements or collective action more generally can no longer adopt an attitude of 'naïvety' (Devons and Gluckman 1964) with respect to the multi-disciplinary body of theoretical and empirical work which now exists on the subject. I would argue that there are several reasons why anthropologists must begin to engage critically with the social movements literature. In the first place, anthropologists have a crucial role to play in challenging the Eurocentrism (Escobar 1992a; Giri 1992) or even Francocentrism (Duyvendak 1994: 37) of much existing work. Secondly, the recent 'cultural turn' in social movements analysis has raised important questions about the conceptualisation of culture which anthropologists are well-qualified to address.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, I believe – and seek to demonstrate in this thesis – that the anthropological study of politics could gain considerably from a critical appropriation (and if necessary reformulation) of concepts originally developed within social movement studies such as those I introduced in the first section. Through an examination of the relationship between subjective and objective dimensions of political opportunity structures, for example, anthropologists could begin address in a more systematic way the role of institutional factors (including the nature of the state) in shaping political action. Finally, anthropologists have an important contribution to make to ongoing debates about methodological issues in social movements research, as I will show in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have brought together concepts from several different theoretical traditions in social movements research in order to construct a framework for the analysis of SOS-Racisme as part of the anti-racist movement in contemporary France. I have argued, firstly, that a clear analytical distinction needs to be maintained between the concepts of social movement and social movement organisation (SMO). SOS-Racisme is not itself a social movement, I have suggested, but rather an SMO within a broader network of anti-racist organisations, groups and individuals. Secondly, I have outlined Melucci's processual and constructionist approach to collective action, and introduced the related concepts of collective identity and political opportunity structure. These concepts will be used in the thesis to analyse how members of SOS-Racisme developed a sense of common purpose and identity which enabled them to act collectively and how they defined the political and institutional context for their action in 1993-94.

The second half of the chapter highlighted the fact that anthropologists have rarely contributed to theoretical and conceptual debates within the field of social movements research and sought to provide an explanation of this state of affairs. Firstly, I examined the five different factors identified by Escobar as responsible for the 'invisibility' of social movements in anthropology. Although many of Escobar's arguments are persuasive, at least with respect to anthropology in the United States, I went on to suggest that the failure of British social anthropologists to play a more significant role in social movements research has been due to the problematic nature of concepts of politics and practice in post-war political anthropology in this country. This thesis attempts, in a modest way, to show that an engagement on the part of anthropologists with social movements theory and research can not only

help to re-orient the anthropological study of politics in a more productive direction, it can also contribute to a better social scientific understanding of social movements and other forms of collective action.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht (1999), Jenkins and Klandermans (1995), Johnston and Klandermans (1995a), Maheu (1995), Melucci (1996), Staggenborg (1998), Tarrow (1994), Wignaraja (1993) and Zirakzadeh (1997). More general overviews of the social movements literature since the 1960s can be found in Morris and Herring (1987), Neidhardt and Rucht (1991), and della Porta and Diani (1999).

<sup>2</sup> It is common in the literature for Resource Mobilisation and New Social Movements Theories to be referred to simply as the 'American' and 'European' approaches respectively (e.g. Klandermans 1991).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Escobar and Alvarez (1992a), Fillieule and Péchu (1993), McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996a), and Munck (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Melucci (1995a: 53), Tarrow (1994: 22) and Duyvendak (1994: 50-1) have also insisted that social movements are networks and not a particular type of organisation, a point which Fillieule's (1997: 37) definition fails to recognise.

<sup>5</sup> This argument has been developed in more detail by Koopmans (1996).

<sup>6</sup> It is true that della Porta and Diani claim that 'movements are by definition fluid phenomena' (1999: 17), but the context makes clear that they are referring here to the shifting nature of collective identities rather than to network structures.

<sup>7</sup> A further problem with della Porta's and Diani's definition of social movements as 'informal' networks is that it appears based on what Jordan and Maloney have referred to as 'an extreme sort of stereotypical interpretation' of interest groups and other organisations as 'more formally organised than social movements' (1997: 55).

<sup>8</sup> In fairness, it should be noted that McCarthy and Zald themselves appeared not entirely convinced of the adequacy of their own formulation (see McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1218, note 8).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Touraine (1988b), Wieviorka (1993e: 129), Waters (1998a: 181-2), and Appleton (1999: 73).

<sup>10</sup> Here I follow Duyvendak (1994: 83) in regarding SOS-Racisme as an example of a social movement organisation. Where he discusses SOS-Racisme in relation to 'the solidarity movement' in France (1994: 224-239), however, I focus more narrowly on the association's position and role within the anti-racist movement. This is closer to members' own conceptions of the wider context of their action (see, for example, Chapter 9), but is not equivalent to the idea of an 'anti-Front national countermovement' proposed by Mayer (1994, 1995). Combatting the Front national has undoubtedly, although to varying degrees over time, been one of SOS-Racisme's goals, but the association has always sought to promote a wider agenda (*intégration* policies, for example).

<sup>11</sup> The distinction between 'old' and 'new' social movements has been the subject of considerable discussion in the literature: see Faulks (1999: 87-103) for an overview of the debate as a whole, and Melucci (1994, 1995b), Calhoun (1993), Dalton, Kuechler and Bürklin (1990), Inglehart (1990), Klandermans (1990), Koopmans (1996) and Rucht (1990) for more detailed statements of the views of the main protagonists. To my mind, Calhoun has convincingly demonstrated that 'the historical claim implicit in the idea of *new* social movements ... is specious', since the supposedly novel features of 1960s movements can equally be said to characterise movements in earlier centuries (1993: 386, emphasis in original). For this reason, I avoid using the 'New Social Movement' label to describe the anti-racist movement in contemporary France, in contrast to commentators such as Waters (1998a and b). Nevertheless, it should be clear from the argument developed in this chapter that I also share Calhoun's view that NSM theory has raised extremely valuable questions for social movements research in general to address (see Calhoun 1993: 388). These include the issues of culture, identity and meaning which feature prominently in my discussion of SOS-Racisme.

<sup>12</sup> Melucci himself appears to acknowledge this possibility when he writes in the passage quoted earlier that a collective identity is 'produced by several individuals (*or groups at a more complex level*)' (1995a: 44, my emphases). This distinction between different levels of complexity could easily be equated with that between an SMO and a social movement.

<sup>13</sup> '...ces mouvements feraient partie des organisations parrainées par le gouvernement et dont les revendications pourraient même faire force de loi.'

<sup>14</sup> One of the few anthropologists to refer consistently to social movements theory in their work is Pnina Werbner. In a series of fascinating publications, she has brought insights from Melucci to bear on the study of 'ethnic leadership' and 'diasporic communities' (see Werbner 1991a and b, 1996, 1998).



<sup>15</sup> An important collection of essays on *Social Movements and Culture* (Johnston and Klandermans 1995a), for example, does not contain a single contribution by an anthropologist nor is 'anthropology' even listed in the volume's Subject Index.

<sup>16</sup> Escobar's argument here echoes Kathleen Gough's earlier discussion of the factors lying behind the failure of anthropologists to examine imperialism as a world system (see Gough 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Rabinow alone proposed, in a very limited way, a politicisation of the university with his call for a study of 'the micro-practices of the academy' (Rabinow 1986: 253).

<sup>18</sup> It should be pointed out here that Marxist anthropologists (e.g. Terray 1972; Godelier 1977; Bloch 1983, 1984) have also developed notions of collective practice. That Escobar ignores this important body of work is perhaps a reflection of its limited influence in the US as compared with Europe (see Melhuus 1993).

<sup>19</sup> See Kuper (1999: 68ff.) for a discussion of the separation of the study of culture from that of social structure or organisation in post-war American (not British) anthropology.

<sup>20</sup> The production of knowledge in anthropology may indeed depend, as Escobar claims, on 'dominant modern modes of knowing and possessing the world' (Escobar 1992a: 419), but this is surely also the case for the other social sciences. Such a factor does not in itself explain the low involvement of anthropologists (as opposed to social scientists as a whole) in social movements research. The underlying problem here is of distinguishing the factors contributing to the invisibility of social movements in anthropology from those bearing on the social sciences more generally.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the similarities between action research and the study of social movements see Melucci (1989: 238-9) and Kemmis (1993).

<sup>22</sup> Notable exceptions are Gledhill (1994: 187-8) and Upadhyia (1996: 3148).

<sup>23</sup> The 'fragmentation and particularism' of social movements research in Britain has also been noted by Rüdiger et al (1991: 121).

<sup>24</sup> As both Vincent (1990: 390) and Collier (1997) have indicated, however, the recent decline of political anthropology must also be situated in the wider context of a general 'waning' of the discipline's subfields.

<sup>25</sup> However, it is important to note Judith Butler's recent comments on 'the tendency to relegate new social movements to the sphere of the cultural, indeed, to dismiss them as being preoccupied with what is called the "merely" cultural, and then to construe this cultural politics as factionalizing, identitarian, and particularistic' (Butler 1998: 33. Cf. Fraser 1998). One of the key stakes here is how the distinction between the material and the cultural is constructed.

<sup>26</sup> While this is a plausible explanation, rather different reasons for the paucity of anthropological research on the state have also been proposed. Marc Abélès (1995: 68), for example, has argued that political anthropology privileged the analysis of 'the non-State (*le non-Etat*)' at least partly in order to assert its distinctiveness as a (sub-)discipline from political science and sociology with their (perceived) preoccupation with the state. Balandier (1995: 220) had previously maintained that political anthropology had 'broken the fascination which the State had long exerted over political theorists' and thus effected a '*décentrement*' of political analysis. This does not necessarily imply that anthropologists believed that the study of the state was 'irrelevant' or 'unchallenging'.

<sup>27</sup> This is an issue which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>28</sup> It is clear, however, that relating the absence of anthropological research on social movements to a lack of interest in mass politics more generally only shifts the problem rather than resolving it. We still need to ask, with Spencer, why anthropologists have rarely investigated forms of mass and institutional politics.

<sup>29</sup> See Abélès and Jeudy (1997: 13) for a similar argument.

<sup>30</sup> This is a point I have developed further in a paper *The Cultural Analysis of Social Movements*, presented at 'For Sociology', BSA Annual Conference, University of Glasgow, 6-9 April 1999.

## Chapter 4

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# Researching Collective Action: From Sociological Intervention to Ethnography

It should be clear from the previous chapter that the study of social movements and other forms of collective action has, since the 1960s, become an increasingly important field of social scientific activity, particularly in Europe and in North America.<sup>1</sup> Although debates about core concepts and theoretical frameworks have undoubtedly been the most conspicuous aspect of this development, some discussion of methodological issues has also occurred. The aim of the present chapter is to add an anthropological perspective to these reflections on the question of method in social movements research. The first section reviews the pioneering attempt by the French sociologist Alain Touraine and his colleagues to devise a research method appropriate to the study of social movements in a 'post-industrial' society. I begin by outlining the main characteristics of this approach, which Touraine refers to as 'sociological intervention (*intervention sociologique*)', and then discuss some of the criticisms which have been levelled against it by both movement activists and other researchers. After considering its strengths and weaknesses, I go on in the second main section to suggest that many of the problems associated with sociological intervention can be avoided by attaching greater importance to participant observation as a key

part of a more general ethnographic approach to social movements and their constituent organisations. Studying a social movement organisation ethnographically, however, is not without its own problems—particularly in an urban setting—and I conclude the section by reflecting briefly on issues raised by my own research on SOS-Racisme in Paris.

### Touraine's Method of Sociological Intervention

The French sociologist Alain Touraine has unquestionably played a crucial role in the emergence of a specific field of social scientific activity concerned with the study of social movements and collective action. In a series of publications (Touraine 1973, 1978, 1983, 1988a) he has proposed a theory of social movements which has come to be regarded as one of the most influential versions of the 'identity-oriented paradigm' outlined in the last chapter (see Cohen 1985: 690-705). However, the importance of Touraine's contribution to the development of theory should not lead us to marginalise or downplay the significance of his discussion of research methodology in this area. Unfortunately, overviews of the social movements literature (e.g. Neveu 1996; della Porta and Diani 1999) tend to focus almost exclusively on Touraine's theoretical work, with relatively little—if any—consideration given to the nature of his research methods. Even the introduction to an important collection of essays entitled *Studying Collective Action* devotes just a short paragraph to Touraine's method (Diani and Eyerman 1992b: 11). This is surprising since, as Melucci has emphasised, Touraine is 'the only author who has proposed a method of research intervention in the field of social movements' (Melucci 1989: 236). The originality of Touraine's contribution to this field is not restricted to the level of theory, therefore, but also derives from his elaboration of an innovative research methodology. In the first part

of this section, I will be concerned to show how the elaboration of theory and the development of new research methods are closely related aspects of Touraine's sociology of collective action.

### *The Nature of the Method*

The method of 'sociological intervention (*intervention sociologique*)' was originally developed by Touraine in the mid-1970s and has subsequently been employed by his team of researchers in a broad range of studies (see Wieviorka 1992: 354-5). It was intended to be the first method specifically adapted to the investigation of social movements and collective action and as such it represents an 'obligatory' (Melucci 1989: 236) starting-point for the discussion of methodology I wish to pursue in this chapter. In what follows, I provide a general account of the various stages which Touraine identifies in a sociological intervention as well as an evaluation of the method's strengths and weaknesses. Touraine insists, however, that the choice of a research method cannot be treated as a simple 'technical' matter but rather is bound up with the researcher's conception of the social reality to be investigated (see Touraine 1978: 184-5, 1980a: 321-323). In order to understand fully the method of sociological intervention, therefore, it is first necessary to examine briefly the general theoretical orientation of Touraine's sociology.

Since the late 1960s Touraine has attempted to reformulate sociological analysis in order to counter what he perceives as strong tendencies within post-war French sociology to portray social life as a static and abstract 'order'. He argued that in a period of dramatic social transformation (the 1960s and 1970s), it was indefensible for sociologists to retain a structural-functionalist model of society and systemic reproduction which rendered human agency invisible. This rejection of the dominant forms of sociological analysis in France led Touraine in turn to propose an alternative approach-

'the sociology of action'-which he has developed in a series of major works (Touraine 1973, 1978, 1988a). Running through Touraine's sociological project is a concern to refocus attention on human agency and on the role of social actors in producing social reality. The conception of society which is the point of departure for his sociology reflects this clearly: 'a society is a hierarchised set of *action systems*, i.e. of social relations between actors who may have conflicting interests but who belong to the same social sphere and therefore share certain cultural orientations' (Touraine 1978: 42, emphases in original).<sup>2</sup> The sociology of action, as defined by Touraine, thus places actors at the centre of sociological analysis by emphasising that society produces itself through conflict over cultural and social resources in concrete situations.

The importance which Touraine attaches to social movements-and, consequently, to the method of sociological intervention-can be viewed as a corollary of this model of society or, to be more precise, social relations. As has just been indicated, Touraine's sociology of action represents society as a hierarchy of fields of social relations within which social actors are engaged in various forms of social and cultural conflict. Touraine argues, however, that within these 'action systems' it is social movements which are the primary actors in the struggle for control of 'historicity', a term which he uses to refer to the dominant cultural patterns which structure social practice (Touraine 1978: 42, 103-134). Touraine provides a striking statement of his general position in the opening sentence of *La Voix et le Regard*: 'Human beings make their history; cultural creation and social conflicts produce social life and at the heart of society burns the fire of social movements' (Touraine 1978: 11).<sup>3</sup> In other words, social movements play a crucial role in conflicts over the organising principles of a society. The analysis of the nature and meaning of such forms of collective action is, consequently, an



essential component of the sociological investigation of the production of social life.

In the light of the above argument, Touraine's decision to base his whole sociological project over the past thirty years on research into social movements becomes readily understandable. Social movements are fundamental to the theoretical model of social reality centred on human agency which he proposes as an alternative to structural-functionalism. This recognition of the theoretical importance of social movements led Touraine in the early 1970s to consider the nature of the research methodology which would be required to study such phenomena empirically. He argued that sociologists had tended to focus on revolutions when addressing the question of agency and 'historical action', and thus to employ an historical rather than a sociological method. Touraine proposed that sociologists were, as a result, 'practically without a method' (Touraine 1980a: 322) when it came to the investigation of collective agents such as social movements, which do not necessarily imply a 'volcanic eruption' of society.

Sociological intervention was, therefore, developed by Touraine in order to provide a research method applicable to the study of social movements within the general theoretical framework of the sociology of action. However, the method was also designed to play a crucial and more specific role in relation to the analysis of contemporary social movements. This becomes clear in the light of the two key propositions which framed much of the empirical research conducted by Touraine in the 1970s and 1980s. The first of these is that the dominant social movement of industrial society, the workers' movement, has become institutionalised as a party and incorporated within the political system (see Touraine 1984). The second is the argument, which Touraine was one of the first sociologists to advance,

that a profound societal change is taking place in advanced capitalist countries equivalent to the transition to a post-industrial society (see Touraine 1969. Cf. Bell 1973; Kumar 1986).

The issue raised by the combination of these developments, according to Touraine, is of identifying the social movement in contemporary society which occupies 'the central role' (Touraine 1980a: 332) played by the workers' movement in industrial society. The method of sociological intervention is designed to identify those actors in the emergent post-industrial society who are engaged in conflict over general cultural orientations and who thus belong to this new social movement. In short, sociological intervention represents nothing less than a method of observing the processes involved in the formation of the key collective actors of post-industrial society.

Thus far, I have been concerned to situate the method of sociological intervention in the context of Touraine's wider sociological project and theoretical interest in social movements. In this way I have tried to avoid presenting sociological intervention as a simple 'technique' which can be isolated from the intellectual project in which it originated. It is now possible to examine the various aspects of the method and the nature of the role which it accords to the researcher. Touraine has provided a general overview of the method in a number of places and I will refer here to the account contained in article published in the *Revue suisse de sociologie* in 1980 (Touraine 1980a. Cf. Touraine 1978, 1982b, 1988a).

Touraine divides a sociological intervention into six stages. First, the researchers assemble 'intervention groups' which are composed of roughly a dozen activists from a range of sectors of a social movement. These people are invited to participate in the research through attending a series of

meetings. The second stage of the intervention consists in observing these groups, at such meetings, in confrontation with other social actors, in particular the Others (or 'adversaries') against whom their action is directed outside the research context. On the basis of their observation of these meetings the researchers formulate an interpretation of the issues at stake in the conflict and present the group members with a view of 'the most profound meaning (*[le] sens le plus profond*)' of their action (Touraine 1980a: 326). In the fourth stage of the intervention the group members discuss the previous meetings as part of a process of 'self-analysis'. The aim of this is for the groups to reflect on their practice and to produce general interpretations of their activity, referred to by Touraine as 'an ideological analysis' (1980a: 327).

The fifth stage is of crucial importance and brings into sharp focus the key role accorded to the researcher in the intervention. Touraine describes this phase of the research as the group's 'conversion' from a self-analysis in terms of its practice to one in terms of the social movement which may be implicit in its modes of action. The researcher acts as a catalyst in this progression by presenting the group with an image of the social movement which it may represent and in relation to which its action derives 'its highest meaning (*son sens le plus élevé*)' (1980a: 327), that is, as conflict over fundamental cultural orientations. If the participants reject the researcher's hypothesis outright or fail to use it to clarify their interpretation of their practice they have, according to Touraine, shown it to be invalid. If, on the other hand, the actors use the researcher's hypothesis to further their self-understanding then it has been validated for that group. The final stage of the intervention, which Touraine describes as 'permanent sociology', consists of the testing of hypotheses derived from one group of a social movement by comparing

them with other groups from the same and differing movements (see Touraine 1980a: 327).

This overview highlights the extent to which the method requires the researcher to intervene actively at various stages of the research process. As Touraine himself states, the 'most important' problem associated with the sociological intervention method is that of satisfactorily defining the role of the researcher (Touraine 1980a: 329). He acknowledges that in such research there is a danger of over-identification on the part of the researcher with the group she is investigating. The success of the intervention, however, depends on the researcher participating alongside the activists in the 'intervention groups' while also retaining the critical distance required for the formulation of interpretive hypotheses at the 'conversion' stage of the research. The researcher is, therefore, called upon to play a twofold role in the intervention process. On the one hand, she must facilitate the analysis which the group undertakes of its own activity at stage four of the intervention ('self-analysis'), interacting closely with actors. On the other, she must present the movement with hypotheses concerning the meaning of its action at stage five ('conversion'), and this necessitates a degree of detachment from the preoccupations and aims of the actors themselves. In order to prevent any confusion between these two roles during the research process, Touraine proceeds to divide them between separate researchers, whom he refers to as 'interpreter' and 'analyst' respectively (see Touraine 1980a: 329).

Touraine and his team of researchers initially conducted sociological interventions in research on the 1976 student strike in France, the anti-nuclear movement, the regionalist movement, trade-unionism and the women's movement. This series of studies comprised the 'first phase'

(Touraine 1980a: 331) in the development of sociological intervention. Since then, the method's field of application has been extended to encompass various other groups and movements (see, for example, the work of François Dubet on 'marginalised' young people [Dubet 1987]). Although sociological intervention has not to date been used to investigate anti-racism, Michel Wieviorka has recently adopted it as a method in order to examine 'the discourse of popular racism' (see Wieviorka 1992).

The preceding account of sociological intervention has attempted to re-situate the method in the wider context of Touraine's sociological project, providing an overview of its main characteristics, as well indicating the range of empirical phenomena to which it has been applied. In the second part of this section I turn to consider the strengths and weaknesses of sociological intervention as a research method for the investigation of social movements and collective action.

### *A Critique of the Method*

As I have already mentioned, there has been a tendency in the social science literature for discussions of Touraine's sociology to focus almost exclusively on his theoretical output and to marginalise (or even ignore) his contribution to the development of innovative research methods. While the strengths and weaknesses of Touraine's sociology of action and theory of social movements have been extensively debated (see, for example, Arnason 1986; Neveu 1996), few commentators have attempted a systematic evaluation of his method.<sup>4</sup> The aim of the following discussion is to redress the balance slightly by reviewing the main objections which have been levelled against sociological intervention since the late 1970s.

In analysing the shortcomings of sociological intervention as a method, however, we should not lose sight of its importance and originality within the field of social movements research. As Melucci has stated, there are aspects of the method which have 'enormous value' (Melucci 1989: 237). In the first place, sociological intervention remains the only method 'designed specifically for examining social movements' and, as such, has influenced even those (including Melucci) who have voiced reservations about its validity. Secondly, as the research method corresponding to the sociology of action, sociological intervention draws attention to social movements as 'systems of relations' (Melucci 1989: 237) between actors. More specifically, the method highlights the extent to which movement identities are formed and collective actions initiated in the context of ongoing social relationships and interaction. Thirdly, the method of sociological intervention has the undoubted merit of focusing attention on the actor-researcher relationship and the specific role of the researcher in the study of collective action. To his credit, Touraine has devised a method which aims to distinguish clearly the position and role of the researcher/sociologist from that of the actors/activists (see Melucci 1989: 237).

For these reasons, sociological intervention is an important addition to the pool of research methods available for the study of contemporary forms of collective action. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the method which have been heavily criticised by other researchers in the field as well as by movement activists themselves. In particular, critics of sociological intervention have tended to concentrate their attention on the following three areas: (1) the researcher's interventionist role; (2) the dynamics and composition of the intervention groups; (3) the forms of collective action investigated by the method. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.



The key role played by the researcher in a sociological intervention has undoubtedly proved to be the most controversial aspect of the method. The main focus of concern has been the researcher's active part in presenting actors with an interpretation of the meaning of their action at the 'conversion' stage. *Pace* Touraine, a number of other sociologists have suggested that this kind of direct intervention in the research process may not in fact be an effective means of revealing the presence (or absence) of a social movement in a given field. Michel Amiot (1980), for example, has argued that the researcher's intervention will inevitably produce reactivity effects and that these could ultimately invalidate the research findings. If actors accept the researcher's interpretation of their action, he contends, this may not reflect an underlying social process occurring in the group (i.e. the formation of a collective actor), as Touraine holds, but simply represent an attempt to conform to the perceived expectations of the researcher. Amiot concludes that in the absence of any explicit mechanism to control for such a possibility the conclusions of a sociological intervention will continue to have 'an ambiguous status' (1980: 422. Cf. Touraine 1980b).

In a similar way, the problem of reactivity has been underlined by Melucci (1989) in his critique of sociological intervention. As I have already explained, in Touraine's method the researcher seeks to establish the existence (or not) of a social movement by presenting actors with a hypothesis about their action's 'highest' meaning. In Melucci's view, the weakness of this procedure is that it introduces a 'stimulus'—the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the movement—which cannot subsequently be distinguished from its 'effects':

The terms of the experiment are turned on their heads—the stimulus becomes simultaneously both cause and effect. The observed behaviour and the interpretation of the meanings of the movement cannot be interpreted properly as products of group action. At best they may be

seen as the result of the interaction with the researcher's interpretative hypothesis. (Melucci 1989: 252)

In other words, the product of the intervention (the 'conversion') may not necessarily correspond to the actual meaning of the group's action but may instead reflect the content introduced by the researcher in her hypothesis. Again, the issue is the apparent inability of sociological intervention to control its own effects. According to Melucci, this lack of 'methodological rigour' leaves Touraine open to the charge of 'confusing research with political agitation'. He asserts that the researcher's 'missionary-teacher role' constantly threatens to undermine the method's capacity to reveal the underlying meaning of the action investigated (Melucci 1989: 239. Cf. Gosselin 1982: 178-9).

Criticism of the interventionist nature of Touraine's method has, however, emanated not only from other sociologists, such as Amiot and Melucci, but also from movement activists themselves. At a conference on social movements which Touraine organised in 1979, for example, activists repeatedly questioned both the legitimacy of sociological intervention and its potential to increase their capacity for action. As one participant explained, women involved in the feminist movement would have difficulty in accepting that Touraine, a man, perform the task of identifying the underlying meaning of their struggle (Jeanne Fagnani, in Touraine 1982a: 39). This point was further developed by a representative of the *occitan* regionalist movement who stated that:

Women are uncomfortable with the fact that Alain Touraine is a man; we are just as uncomfortable with the fact that he is a Parisian. [...] What gives someone the right to intervene in a debate, as an outsider, in order to 'give you a helping hand' and increase your capacity for action? (Yves Rouquette, quoted in Touraine 1982a: 39)<sup>5</sup>

As the above comments make clear, a key question for activists has been the extent to which it is legitimate for an outside researcher like Touraine—who, in other circumstances, might even be regarded as a political opponent—to 'intervene' in their movements. Although Touraine has dismissed such arguments, somewhat disingenuously perhaps, as merely a gate-keeping strategy on the part of 'organic intellectuals' (Touraine 1982a: 40), I believe that important issues are being raised here which researchers need to address. In particular, I would suggest that both Fagnani and Rouquette highlight the way in which a researcher's power, status and identity (real or perceived) can affect their relationships with actors and, consequently, influence the outcome of the research process as a whole.

A further illustration of this last point is provided by Touraine's attempted sociological intervention in the French student movement of the 1970s. In a striking contribution to the 1979 conference mentioned above, a former activist, Didier Lapeyronnie<sup>6</sup> analyses the reasons why many in the student movement rejected Touraine's research and its conclusions. As Lapeyronnie explains, the intervention was carried out in 1976 against the background of an ongoing conflict between students and teaching staff over the control and transmission of knowledge. The students consequently viewed Touraine and his colleagues with some suspicion, regarding them as belonging to the group of 'mandarins' whose very power and authority was being contested. According to Lapeyronnie, the students' repudiation of Touraine's intervention thus partly reflected one of the movement's aims: the refusal of a 'situation of dependency' with respect to those in the possession of knowledge. In more general terms, student activists looked upon the researchers' interpretation of their action as a political intervention, by an interested party, in an ongoing conflict. As Lapeyronnie concludes, this perception of Touraine's team as political adversaries effectively rendered

any 'conversion' to the researchers' hypothesis on the part of the students impossible (Lapeyronnie 1982: 27).<sup>7</sup>

A first set of criticisms of Touraine's method of sociological intervention has focused, therefore, on the researcher's role of presenting actors with an interpretation of their action's 'highest' meaning. For sociologists such as Amiot and Melucci, this procedure is problematic because it risks producing reactivity effects which could undermine the validity of the research findings. Movement activists, for their part, have drawn attention to the more general issue of power in researcher-actor relationships and have questioned the legitimacy of the researcher's intervention in their struggles. The underlying problem identified here by both groups of critics is Touraine's failure to reflect fully on the nature and implications of the relationship between researcher(s) and movement actors.

A second series of objections to Touraine's method has centred on the dynamics and composition of the 'intervention groups' which are formed at the start of the research process. As I have already indicated, the members of these groups are drawn from the different organisations and sectors of the movement to be investigated. Under Touraine's direction, and with the assistance of his research team, the groups participate in a series of meetings (including some with their adversaries) and undertake an intensive analysis of their own action. According to Touraine, the use of such groups and the 'quasi-experimental' nature of sociological intervention more generally are necessary in order to reveal a particular action's 'highest' meaning, i.e. the extent to which it reflects a struggle for the control of historicity and the underlying existence of a social movement (see Touraine 1980a: 325).

The method's reliance on purpose-built research groups has, however, been criticised on a number of grounds. Melucci, for example, has argued that

artificially bringing together activists from different sectors of a social movement for lengthy periods of interaction is likely to produce a set of inter-personal dynamics rooted in the specific conditions of the research situation itself rather than reflecting patterns of behaviour occurring in 'natural' groups. In particular, he suggests that the formation of *ad hoc* intervention groups (whose members may not even know each other beforehand) may result in the emergence of collective identities based more on the 'affective relations' operating within these groups than on wider social processes (1989: 243).

Similarly, Melucci highlights the artificial nature of the confrontations between movement actors and their 'interlocutors' which form part of the second stage of a sociological intervention. Such encounters are designed to re-create, in an experimental setting, the network of social relationships linking movement actors not only to allies and supporters but also to adversaries (see Touraine 1980a: 326). This is consistent with Touraine's emphasis on action systems but ignores the fact that it is relatively rare for political opponents in contemporary Western democracies (as elsewhere) to meet each other 'face to face'. Rather, their relationships are mediated in a variety of different ways—by institutions, and broadcast and other media. By instigating direct contacts between these parties and thereby potentially creating a range of affective reactions, sociological intervention again runs the risk of a 'distortion' of the very processes it seeks to investigate (Melucci 1989: 255).<sup>8</sup>

These problems are compounded by the highly selective composition of the intervention groups. By assembling groups composed entirely of 'activists (*militants*)', Touraine fails fully to take into account the plural nature of social movement membership. Although he insists that the intervention

groups should be characterised by 'the greatest possible diversity (*la plus grande diversité*)', this is intended only in the sense of ensuring that all sectors and organisations within a social movement are adequately represented. Touraine makes it clear that the groups are to be 'formed of actors *or more strictly of activists*', a procedure which focuses attention narrowly on the movement's most active participants (1980a: 326, my emphases).<sup>9</sup>

Melucci's argument (1989: 17-37) that collective action is a social construction, however, highlights the fact that social movements contain a range of actors, with varying levels of commitment, experience and orientations to action. Investigation of the 'unity' or identity of a social movement must, therefore, recognise the heterogeneous combination of elements (including the actual members) of which it is composed. Touraine's decision to concentrate on the single category of activists masks this diversity and perhaps reflects the tendency among social scientists more generally to treat social movements as relatively homogeneous entities or unified subjects (see Melucci 1989: 202). One of the obvious dangers of such an approach is the implicit assumption that it is possible to generalise from the characteristics of core activists to those of social movement members as a whole. This has been a problem with much of the social movements literature in the past (Jordan and Maloney 1997: 49), and is an issue which Touraine has not addressed satisfactorily in his contributions to the debates.<sup>10</sup>

While most of the objections to sociological intervention have centred on the role played by the researcher and the dynamics and composition of the intervention groups, other features of the method have also been questioned. As Melucci again has highlighted, these include a failure to examine the



importance of non-verbal aspects of communication and the form as well as the content of collective action. The method concentrates on the 'verbal output' of the groups involved in the research, without considering how this might be affected by modes of interaction and non-linguistic cues (Melucci 1989: 238). Taken together with the main criticisms discussed above, this final point must raise serious doubts about the extent to which sociological intervention is able to generate insights into the complex process of collective identity construction.

## Toward an Ethnographic Approach to Social Movements

An important task for current researchers is to identify ways of studying social movements and other forms of collective action which avoid the problems associated with Touraine's interventionist method.<sup>11</sup> In this section, I discuss the strengths and the weaknesses of the ethnographic approach which I adopted in my own research on SOS-Racisme. I argue that fieldwork, involving long-term participant observation, semi-structured interviewing and archival work, enabled me to investigate processes of collective identity construction at local and national levels of the association more effectively than if I had attempted a sociological intervention (see Appendix 1 for a 'list of archives and dossiers consulted' and Appendix 2 for a 'list of individuals and organisations interviewed'). In so doing, I use the terms 'ethnography' and 'fieldwork' interchangeably to refer to research conducted through participant observation *in combination with* other methods such as interviewing and textual analysis (Briand and Chapoulie 1991: 450). Ethnography is not, in other words, reducible to participant observation alone (see Fortier 1998: 48; Back 1996: 22). This is a crucial point to clarify at the outset, for my argument will be that there are certain limitations to the

use of participant observation to study social movements which only a more general ethnographic approach including other methods can overcome.

### *Challenging Touraine's Rejection of Observational Methods*

A central argument of this thesis is that participant observation is one of the most appropriate methods for examining the processual and constructionist nature of collective action. This is in direct contrast to Touraine, who rejects observational techniques outright as a valid source of insight into the formation of a collective actor. It is interesting to examine Touraine's reasons for doing so, as they reflect the lack of importance traditionally attached to observation in French sociology more widely (see Briand and Chapoulie 1991). As I explained earlier, Touraine's sociology of action starts from the proposition that society is a hierarchy of fields of social relations within which actors are involved in various forms of conflict over key resources. Touraine maintains, however, that neither these social relations nor the fundamental cultural stakes over which actors are competing can be observed directly; they are instead hidden or concealed behind another 'level' of social reality (1980a: 325).

According to Touraine, a distinction can be drawn between, on the one hand, behaviour which responds or adapts to a given situation (*conduites de réponse*) and, on the other, behaviour which seeks to question or transform the nature of that situation (*conduites de mise en question*). These can be related in turn to representations of society as, in the first case, a stable and coherent 'social order' and, in the second, a product of social conflict over the definition of fundamental cultural orientations with actors as producers of their own history. For Touraine, the purpose of a sociological intervention is to reveal the existence of the second, 'deeper' level of action (reality) which is normally buried under 'the weight of everyday situations (*le poids des*

*situations quotidiennes*)' and the adaptive responses the latter typically call forth. He argues that it is the sociologist's role to 'pull (*tirer*)' members of the intervention groups towards an understanding of their own action in these terms, and to 'shatter the illusion (*briser l'illusion*)' that society is an established order and not constantly produced and reproduced through conflictual social relations (1980a: 325; 1978: 183-6; 1982c: 20-1).

It is this crucial distinction between two levels (or representations) of social reality which leads Touraine to reject observation as a research method in favour of sociological intervention. He claims that what is accessible to observation is only the level of pragmatic action and 'ideological declarations' (1982c: 20). This conceals a more profound level of social relations, cultural conflicts and 'historic' action which is not directly observable but instead requires the active intervention of the sociologist to bring it to light. Touraine argues, therefore, that 'it is necessary to go further than observation (*il faut aller plus loin que l'observation*)' (1980a: 325) in order to investigate sociologically the 'highest' or 'deepest' meaning of any particular example of collective action.

In my view, this relegation of observational techniques to the margins of Touraine's sociology is indicative of a wider trend in French sociology since its establishment as a separate university discipline in the early 1960s. At the time when Touraine was beginning his career, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the emergent discipline in France was strongly influenced by the type of sociology developed at Columbia University in the United States which typically confined observation to the preparatory stages of a research project. As Briand and Chapoulie have shown, this resulted in a marked tendency among French sociologists, from the 1960s until relatively recently, to assume that 'observation [could] only picture obvious or trivial aspects of

social reality rather than bring significant contributions to theoretical analyses' (1991: 456). Touraine's rejection of observational research on social movements is clearly motivated by precisely this assumption.

But is Touraine correct effectively to dismiss observation in natural settings as a useful method in research on social movements? I would argue that his argument is open to at least three main objections. Firstly, he implies that actors are, in normal circumstances (i.e. when they are not participating in a sociological intervention), operating with a type of false consciousness which prevents them from appreciating the 'real' meaning of their action. It is only through the intervention of the sociologist, Touraine insists, that actors can move or 'rise (*s'élever*)' (1980a: 325) from this level of reality (the dominant ideology) to an understanding of the transformative potential of human action and the conflictual nature of social relations (the sociology of action). In this regard, he explicitly compares sociological intervention to the process of psychoanalysis in which the analyst assists the patient in exploring their unconscious. Somewhat ironically perhaps, given the sociology of action's emphasis on the importance of agency, the passage from 'false' to 'true' consciousness is presented here as the result of an intervention *by the sociologist* (albeit with the involvement of actors): it cannot occur 'spontaneously', i.e. independently and in the context of actors' collective struggles (1980a: 325).

What these comments serve to highlight is the extent to which Touraine's rejection of observational techniques is based on an assumption that the observable conduct and ordinary statements of collective actors provide little insight into the 'real' meaning of their action and are therefore not worthy of sociological investigation. I would argue, however, that such a position significantly under-estimates the capacity of social movement activists

themselves to analyse and reflect upon the nature of the struggles in which they are involved. As I showed in Chapter 2, the members of SOS-Racisme among whom I conducted my research situated their action in relation to wider projects of social transformation which they were able clearly to articulate. These played a key role in framing and orienting individuals' participation in collective action and cannot simply be dismissed as, in Touraine's phrase, 'ideological declarations'.

Secondly, Touraine mistakenly assumes that an observational method is incapable of producing an analysis of action which transcends the often contextual and partial character of actors' own accounts. As I have already noted, he emphasises the need to 'go further' than observation and actors' views of themselves as responding to an 'established order', and presents sociological intervention as the way to achieve this. In so doing, he reduces observational research to a simple description of observed action and an acceptance at face value of actors' interpretations of its meaning. The potential contribution of observation is, however, much greater than Touraine appears willing to acknowledge. For example, anthropological fieldwork—which is, admittedly, based on *participant* observation—involves 'constructing the world of others in ways which go beyond or indeed belie the subjects' statements about their world [and] is a total bodily experience, not one merely dependent on verbal accounts' (Okely 1994: 61). Touraine's wholesale rejection of 'observation' (treated as a homogeneous set of methods) prevents him from appreciating the role which participant observation, thus conceived, could play in social movements research.

Thirdly, Touraine's failure even to consider the possibility of using an observational method to study the formation of collective actors sits uneasily with some of his more general methodological comments. In particular, an *a*

*priori* dismissal of observation appears inconsistent with statements such as the following: 'Sociologists must study collective behaviour *as directly as possible* [and] in the most varied situations' (Touraine 1978: 190, my emphases).<sup>12</sup> This implies a commitment not only to examining the full range of forms in which collective action is expressed but surely also to observing such action in the context of its occurrence, at least in part. Sociological intervention, however, assumes that collective action has a 'highest meaning' which it is necessary to uncover by stripping away and effectively disregarding the 'lower' level of pragmatic elements which are the most visible in everyday life. The result is an extremely narrow focus on one particular kind of conduct, defined as 'historic', and a lack of attention to the relationship between pragmatic and potentially transformatory (or, in terms which Touraine does not use, 'reformist' and 'revolutionary') dimensions of concrete social movement action. The complex and multifaceted nature of much observable collective action is, in short, abandoned as a topic for sociological analysis.

### *The Importance of Participant Observation*

The three points which I have just considered highlight the need for a more careful discussion of the place of observation—and particularly participant observation—in social movements research than is to be found in Touraine's work. One issue which immediately arises is the extent to which an approach based on participant observation avoids the problems associated with sociological intervention outlined in the last section. As I noted there, a first set of criticisms has focused on the interventionist nature of Touraine's method, with academic commentators pointing to the danger of 'reactivity effects' and activists questioning the legitimacy of the sociologist's intervention in their movements. Now there is no doubt that research



involving participant observation also constitutes an 'intervention' of sorts in people's everyday lives (Burawoy 1991b: 295). Although most anthropologists have usually followed Malinowski in regarding this primarily as a way of grasping 'the native's point of view' (Malinowski 1922: 25) rather than, as in the case of sociological intervention for Touraine, a means of increasing a group's 'capacity for action', it is undeniable that by their very presence the participant observer does affect the 'reality' which they are attempting to investigate. However, instead of constituting a source of 'bias' which must be 'neutralised' (in the terms of positivist social science), the researcher's participation and interaction with subjects is essential to the process of knowledge production. It is precisely through 'dialogue' and a sharing of experience that the researcher comes to understand the daily lives of the people with whom they are working (Burawoy 1991a).

Nevertheless, the 'interventionist' nature of participant observation as a method does mean that its use in social movements research raises issues similar to those identified by critics of sociological intervention. On the one hand, participant observers in general also confront the problem of 'reactivity' in the sense that subjects' perceptions of the researcher's identity and aims can play an important role 'in constraining or creating the possibility of effective access to particular situations or groups' (Jenkins 1984: 152). Moreover, subjects' views of the participant observer and the research situation can have significant implications for the way they present themselves to and interact with the researcher (see Mauger 1991; Okely and Callaway 1992). In the case of my own research on SOS-Racisme, it was a (well-founded) perception of my lack of fluency in the French language which most obviously determined both my initial reception by members of the local committee I joined and the subsequent role I was invited to play within it (see Chapter 2).

On the other hand, research based on participant observation rather than sociological intervention is still likely to encounter the opposition of social movement actors. In particular, the latter may question the reasons for the participant observer's presence, and compare it to espionage and infiltration by the police and other state agencies (cf. Delamont 1995: 10-11).<sup>13</sup> My research on SOS-Racisme was criticised in precisely these terms by one activist in the local committee of which I was a member. It was the only time that a member of the association challenged the legitimacy of my research in a situation where I was present. The circumstances were the following:

One evening near the end of my fieldwork I interviewed 'Didier' in a bar close to where we both lived in Paris. The interview had gone well, I believed. The next day I met him by chance in the street and we went for a coffee together in a nearby café. As we sat down, he started to ask me again about the purpose of my research. I repeated some of what I had explained during earlier conversations as well as immediately prior to conducting the interview the previous evening. We then talked about another student (known to both of us personally) who was working on a thesis about an immigrant association based in Paris. At this point Didier commented that he wondered whether the kind of research the other student and myself were conducting did not in fact enable the 'powers that be (*les pouvoirs en place*)' to de-stabilise oppositional movements by revealing points of internal fracture or tension. He claimed that we drew attention to divisions within such movements and that the authorities could subsequently play on these in order to undermine the development of united opposition to their policies. With a wry smile, he added finally that in order to prevent this happening he had

'falsified everything (*tout faussé*)' during the interview the previous evening.<sup>14</sup>

A possible response to this would be that state agencies collect their own information on social movement and other political organisations and do not depend on social researchers to perform this function for them. SOS-Racisme received ministerial confirmation in 1990, for example, that its Parisian headquarters had been burgled several years earlier by the RG (*Renseignements Généraux*, the French equivalent of Special Branch) and two plastic bags filled with documents removed (*L'Humanité*, 26 October 1990). Moreover, I talked to other members of SOS-Racisme who thought it highly probable that members of the RG had infiltrated the association in the past, and the latter were certainly present during public demonstrations which it organised during my fieldwork. At least one activist, a prominent member of the Revolutionary Communist League, also had his phoned tapped, first by the Chirac government in 1986 and then again in 1988 when the Socialists were re-elected (Filoche 1998: 284-6).

Nevertheless, Didier's comments do raise important questions about the politics of social scientific research on social movements, a subject which is rarely addressed in the literature (an exception is Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 2. Cf. Fuchs and Plass 1999). One way of answering his concerns would be to point out that social scientific analysis of a movement's internal divisions is potentially as useful to movement activists as it is to their political opponents. However, this is only likely to be the case if a theoretical emphasis on the heterogeneous and pluralistic nature of social movements—their fragmentation, in other words—is accompanied by an equal concern with the process of collective identity formation—the search for unity and consensus which is so important for activists (see Epstein 1990: 46-52). In the

chapters which follow, I attempt to produce an analysis which could be *for* as well as *about* activists in SOS-Racisme by focusing on this relationship between unity and diversity.

In addition to these political issues, however, the conversation with Didier summarised above draws attention to a key methodological point. His admission that he had deliberately given false or at least misleading answers to my interview questions highlights the importance of a triangulation of techniques in social research and the danger of relying on a single method such as interviewing or indeed participant observation. One of the advantages of the pluri-method ethnographic approach used in this study of SOS-Racisme was precisely that I could assess the reliability of the information which Didier provided during the interview by cross-checking it with archival sources and material gathered through participant observation. This kind of triangulation is an essential part of the validation process in qualitative research (see Mucchielli 1991: 113-4; Hannerz 1980: 310).

Participant observation is, therefore, as likely as sociological intervention to give rise to problems of 'reactivity' and legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> In other respects, however, I would argue that it has a number of distinct advantages over Touraine's method as far as the investigation of social movements is concerned. As I noted in the last section, sociological intervention's reliance on purpose-built research groups to recreate the processes involved in the formation of a collective actor in a 'quasi-experimental' setting has numerous drawbacks. In contrast, the great strength of participant observation, as Melucci has recognised, is that it allows pre-existing groups of movement actors to be studied in their 'natural environment' (1989: 247). The method permits, in other words, an observation of collective action in the actual context of its occurrence, rather than under artificial or 'laboratory'

conditions, as is the case with sociological intervention. This has several advantages, which can be illustrated using examples from my own fieldwork.

Firstly, participant observation as a member of a local committee of SOS-Racisme enabled me to trace the networks of social relationships which linked members of the association not only with each other but also with actors in the wider anti-racist movement and beyond.<sup>16</sup> Most importantly, I was in a position to note relationships and observe interaction between members of SOS-Racisme in a range of different contexts: the association's Parisian headquarters, local committee and National Council meetings, a 'summer school (*université d'été*)' which it organised, demonstrations, concerts, public debates as well as more informal or social settings. In a similar way, I was able to gain an insight into the networks which connected activists from different anti-racist organisations and other groups. This was possible through attending the co-ordination meetings which were held to plan demonstrations and other 'unitary (*unitaires*)' initiatives and by personally participating in such events themselves.

A second advantage of participant observation is that it allows exchanges between movement actors and their various 'interlocutors' to be observed directly, thereby avoiding the need for the staged confrontations which are such a problematic feature of sociological intervention. In my research on SOS-Racisme I was thus able to witness the reaction and hear the comments of members of the public as I distributed the association's leaflets at metro stations with members of the local committee or other activists, or as I took part in a public meeting organised by the local committee. At the national level, face to face exchanges between the association's spokespeople, politicians and representatives of other organisations could be observed at

debates or meetings and more mediated forms studied through newspaper articles and television broadcasts (see Chapter 9). In situations where I was perceived as one of SOS-Racisme's activists (rather than a researcher), such as a visit to an immigrant workers' hostel to publicise a local committee initiative or a distribution of leaflets at the traditional May-day rally, I also was able to register the hostility felt by certain 'interlocutors' towards the association by becoming the object of it myself.<sup>17</sup>

Thirdly, participant observation in 'natural' groups provides a way of exploring the different levels of commitment, experience and orientations to action which are present among actors in a social movements and their constituent organisations (cf. Melucci 1989: 242). A weakness of sociological intervention is its failure to recognise this diversity: the ad hoc 'intervention groups' which Touraine forms for his research are composed entirely of activists. In contrast, participant observation in one of SOS-Racisme's local committees over an eighteen-month period allowed me to observe interaction between committed activists, on the one hand, and members whose involvement was more intermittent, on the other, as well as their joint attempts to recruit and retain new members. It also provided me with valuable insights into the ways in which disagreements about strategy or the association's position on particular issues influenced the committee's action and the involvement of specific individuals over time.

Finally, unlike sociological intervention, which focuses exclusively on the movement actors' verbal utterances, participant observation enables the researcher to study 'behaviour which people do not readily verbalise about' (Hannerz 1980: 309) as well as the relationship between verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication. Facial expressions and gestures acted as an important commentary on the verbal exchanges which took place at local



committee and National Council meetings which I attended in the course of my fieldwork on SOS-Racisme, as did seating arrangements and the use of space more generally. At other times, it was the absence of spoken utterances which was significant: for example, silence after a particular intervention in a debate was often an indication that the speaker's view was not shared by those present. Only long-term participant observation provides the type of 'grounded knowledge' (Okely 1994: 62) which is required in order first to contextualise and then to interpret such phenomena satisfactorily.

Over the last fifteen years, the limitations of 'experimental' approaches and the importance of participant observation in 'natural' settings have increasingly come to be appreciated by scholars within the field of social movements research. One of the first was Melucci, who wrote in the late 1980s that 'the organisational characteristics of the natural group [could not] emerge satisfactorily in an experimental situation', and that 'laboratory work' with such groups should, as a result, to be 'supplemented' with direct observation of actual meetings and public mobilisations (Melucci 1989: 247). Other scholars, however, have gone much further than Melucci and suggested that participant observation cannot be confined to an ancillary role in social movements research in the way he implies. Indeed Paul Lichterman has even argued, in his study of US environmental activists, that:

participant-observation is the only method for deriving some kinds of 'social facts'. Practices of commitment and everyday enactments of social identity are just such social facts. Social and political identities are not simply given; people must construct themselves as political actors—in interaction with others—to organise social movements. Only through participant-observation can we find out how people construct these identities in everyday milieux and create bonds of political community. (Lichterman 1996: 240)

In Lichterman's view, then, the ways in which members of social movements construct identities in the course of their daily lives through interaction with

other people can only be studied through participant observation. Although interviews can provide an insight into how people think about political solidarity and the types of idiom they use to interpret their own conduct, he insists that 'we need to understand speech in the context of everyday action and interaction if we want to see how commitments translate into group solidarities' (1996: 240). Participant observation is thus required in order to contextualise people's use of language and to investigate how it both sustains and is produced by collective action.

Given the advantages of participant observation discussed earlier and those which Lichterman identifies here, I would argue (*contra* Touraine and Melucci) that it is in fact the most appropriate single method for studying processes of identity construction in social movements and their constituent organisations. Compared to the more 'experimental' methods devised by both Touraine and Melucci, in particular, it has the enormous advantage of enabling the researcher to examine such processes in their 'natural' settings. As the chapters in Part III of the present thesis will demonstrate, this includes the possibility of exploring the crucial interplay between, in Melucci's terms, the 'latent' and 'visible' phases of social movement activity.

### *Problems and Limitations*

An assessment of the potential contribution of participant observation to social movements research would not be complete, however, without a discussion of problems associated with the method which would be likely to limit its usefulness in the study of such phenomena. In my view, there are in fact three main issues which need to be addressed, and I propose to clarify them by again using examples from my own Paris-based research on SOS-Racisme. The first is the extent to which crucial decisions or processes affecting social movements and their constituent organisations are capable of

being directly observed. The second is the difficulty of carrying out continuous participant observation in an urban environment, and particularly in a 'world' (Hannerz 1993) or 'soft global' (Body-Gendrot 1996) city such as Paris. The third is the question of the representativity and generalisability of participant observation studies of relatively small, localised groups. Although participant observation research on social movements undoubtedly also raises other issues, several of which I have discussed earlier, I would argue that the following three points highlight the method's limitations in a particularly clear way.

Firstly, for all its advantages, participant observation depends on 'a certain openness, or public accessibility' (Grillo 1985: 16) of the phenomena being investigated. In a complex network of organisations, institutions and individuals such as the modern state (or a social movement, for that matter), decision-making and other key processes may be hidden from the view of a participant observer, as a researcher's access to important meetings or influential people is usually severely restricted, if it exists at all. As Jenkins has stated:

The higher one researches within the organisational hierarchies of the modern state or industry, the less likely it is that one will be allowed to do participant observation; even more rarely are enough decisions made in public to allow for the construction of an adequate account of what is going on through observation alone. (Jenkins 1984: 160)

The implication which Jenkins draws from this is that although participant observation may be 'necessary', it is not 'sufficient' in studies of complex organisations in modern, urban societies (1984: 162). The opacity of decision-making processes, in particular, means that data which is acquired through participant observation must often be supplemented with information from other sources collected using non-observational methods. In order to

reconstruct the order of events described in Chapter 8, for example, I had to rely on newspaper reports and interview material as well as participant observation. The meetings between the president of SOS-Racisme and a prominent politician which triggered these events occurred in private and only became known to grassroots members of the association several weeks later, in many cases through the national press. Participant observation in a local committee enabled me to study the reaction of its members as the news came out, but I did not have access to the actual meetings between the association's president and the politician, Bernard Tapie. Only subsequent conversations and interviews with activists and a review of press reports allowed me to piece together a fuller account of the whole affair, although even then certain elements remained unclear.

The importance of the telephone as a means of communication in modern, urban societies further reduces the extent to which the transmission of information is open to direct observation on the part of the researcher. As Gutwirth has noted, it is often the telephone, rather than the café or the public square, which plays the key role in the maintenance of social networks in the United States and Europe (1982: 14). Indeed, Delaporte (1986) found in his study of Parisian entomologists and their associations that it was primarily through telephone conversations that information was exchanged. He explains (1986: 166n8) that it was in fact the number of telephone calls which he received at his home which enabled him to 'quantify' his gradual integration into their network, a process which took three years and required the capture of some important insects!

Members of the local committee of SOS-Racisme which I joined also telephoned each other regularly in the days and weeks between meetings to pass on information about demonstrations and other events organised by the

association at a national level as well as about the activities of the committee itself. In a similar way, National Bureau members telephoned members of the association's local committees throughout France in order to invite them to National Council meetings or to keep them informed about developments more generally (although the [in-]frequency with which this occurred was a point of contention between provincial activists and the Parisian leadership during my fieldwork). It took me at least six months to become integrated into these local and national telephone networks, after which time members of the local committee would contact me both to provide and to request information about current events and I would receive calls from the Parisian headquarters about national initiatives. This highlights the importance of direct participation and personal involvement rather than simple observation for the study of movement networks.

A second general problem is that continuous or 'around-the-clock' (Hannerz 1980: 310) participant observation—traditionally regarded as the hallmark of anthropological fieldwork—is often impossible in the urban settings where many social movements and SMOs, at least in Western European societies, are active. Most of the members of SOS-Racisme's local committees in Paris, for example, worked during the day in different companies or organisations scattered across the city and to which I had either no or very restricted access. This meant that opportunities for meeting them were limited to evenings (which was when meetings were held, usually on a fortnightly basis in the case of the committee I joined) and weekends.

Even at these times, however, what Grillo has referred to as 'the privatisation of behaviour and relationships' (1985: 16) made it extremely difficult for me, at least in the first six months of fieldwork, to establish and maintain more informal contacts with committee members in the periods between meetings.

In common with other anthropologists working in urban France, I found that access to the private sphere of people's lives was to a large extent closed and opportunities for direct observation were rare (see Le Wita 1982: 198; Delaporte 1986: 165). Although I regularly visited the homes of two activists in the local committee with which I was involved, it was only in the final few months of my fieldwork, and for the specific purpose of conducting an interview, that I was invited into the domestic space of other members. (Even then, most still suggested that we conduct the interview in a café or during a lunch-break at their place of employment.) This was due in large part to the fact that many lived a considerable distance away, in the 'suburbs (*banlieues*)' to the east and west of the central Parisian *arrondissement* after which the 'local' committee was named and where its meetings were held, or else in very small studio flats.<sup>18</sup>

In short, I tended to meet most members only at local committee, National Council and public meetings, distributions of leaflets and billpostings, demonstrations, and the visits to cafés or restaurants which frequently preceded or followed such events. Continuous participant observation was impossible because of the 'part-time' nature of each member's involvement in the local committee and their limited availability and accessibility at other times. Supplementary interviews conducted in the last two months of fieldwork were thus an important way of exploring particular key themes in more detail: these included the person's past and present experiences of activism, conceptions of politics, and positions in current debates on immigration and racism.<sup>19</sup>

The final issue which I want to consider here is the representativity and generalisability of participant observation studies of small, localised sections of a social movement or, even more narrowly, social movement organisation.



The present thesis involved long-term participant observation in a Paris-based committee of SOS-Racisme which numbered, at the most, only a dozen regular activists: to what extent was this committee representative of others within the association, and under what conditions can the thesis's findings be generalised to other anti-racist associations and to the movement as a whole?

The question of representativity arises in relation to both the composition and the activities of the local committee. In terms of its composition, the local committee with which I was involved was representative of SOS-Racisme's membership more widely in two key respects. Firstly, it included members associated with all three of the main political 'tendencies' which existed within the association nationally: the Socialist Left current of the Socialist Party, a current of the Revolutionary Communist League, and a residual category of people without a declared party political affiliation (see Chapter 2). Secondly, the fact that most committee members were in their late 20s and early 30s was consistent with the results of a survey carried out by another researcher during the period of my fieldwork which found the average age of SOS-Racisme's members to be 32 years (see Juhem 1998).

In order to assess the extent to which the local committee's activities reflected those of not only other Parisian but also provincial committees I adopted a number of different procedures. Firstly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with activists from three other Parisian committees, as well as with members of the committee who had previously been involved either in provincial committees or in different ones within the Paris region. Secondly, I attended the association's National Council meetings, where delegates reported on their committees' activities (sometimes circulating a written summary to those present), thereby gaining an insight into differences

between the Parisian committees and those based in other major French cities (such as Marseilles, Toulouse and Lyon) and elsewhere. More informal conversations with members of other committees from across France at these meetings and at the association's residential 'summer school' in July 1994 also allowed me to place the local committee's action in a wider context (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion).

The present thesis was conceived as an investigation of a specific social movement organisation rather than as a study of the anti-racist movement as a whole, and the research design was not intended to support generalisations at this second level. Although I argue at several points (see, for example, Chapters 7 and 8) that its findings have wider implications, I remain cautious about generalising from this examination of a single association at a particular stage in its development to a movement which is a network of heterogeneous organisations, more informal groups and individuals. Nevertheless, it is in fact possible, under certain circumstances, for more general conclusions eventually to be drawn from participant observation research of relatively small, localised groups. As the French political anthropologist Marc Abélès has suggested:

A localised analysis constitutes the best point of departure for any subsequent generalisation, but on two conditions: 1. that it does not confine itself to restrictive choices of scale, [and] 2. that it does not claim to go beyond its limits and bypass a comparative approach. (Abélès 1993: 62. See also 1992: 19.)<sup>20</sup>

In his own research, Abélès has responded to the first of these requirements by a form of 'ethnological nomadism' (*nomadisme ethnologique*) (1989: 21) which has involved a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the various levels of the French political system (commune, canton, region and *département*). He argues that it is only through such 'successive decentrings

(*décentrement successifs*)' (1988b: 816) or changes in scale that the interconnections between the micro- and macro-levels of power can be understood. The need for such 'multiple scale analyses (*analyses à échelles multiples*)' using a range of methods has also been noted by other anthropologists working in both urban and rural France (see Bromberger 1995: 290; Zonabend 1984: ix).

In a similar way, my investigation of SOS-Racisme as part of the anti-racist movement and in relation to national political processes required a constant shifting of scales or levels. On the one hand, an analysis of the significance of SOS-Racisme's current position on an issue was frequently impossible without an examination of previous debates within the association and its development in the intervening period (see, for example, Chapter 10). On the other, limiting the study to the micro-level of the local committee would, in Bromberger's words, have been equivalent to 'a confinement which engenders short-sightedness (*une claustration qui engendre la myopie*)' (1997: 304). Instead, it was necessary to move back and forth between this level, the Parisian committees more generally, and finally the association as a whole viewed in a wider political context. This required a combination of participant observation at different levels of the association, interviewing and archival work.

However, if the analysis of SOS-Racisme presented in this thesis is not limited to the micro-level, it only partially fulfils Abélès' second condition of generalisability, which is the inclusion of a comparative dimension. Conceived primarily as a detailed study of one of the most prominent anti-racist organisations in contemporary France, the research was in fact never intended to provide this wider perspective itself (although that does not, of course, preclude its eventual use as one element of a more general

comparison at some later stage). Nevertheless, the research design did attempt to include a degree of comparison with other anti-racist organisations. Participant observation was also carried out over a period of fifteen months as a member of a local committee of the MRAP (*Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples* [Movement Against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples]) which is currently one of the other main anti-racist associations in France (see House 1997 and Lloyd 1998). In addition, interviews were conducted with two members of the MRAP, as well as with representatives of several immigrant and human rights organisations (see Appendix 2B). Although this work generated valuable insights and provided me with an external perspective on SOS-Racisme, it was not sufficient to support generalisations at the level of the anti-racist movement as a whole.

The limitations of participant observation which I have reviewed in the final part of this section highlight the fact that while use of the method may be *necessary* in social movements research (for the reasons which I have also outlined), it is rarely, if ever, *sufficient* to provide a full account of events or processes. This is why the present thesis relied on a wider *ethnographic* approach in which long-term participant observation was 'supplemented' by semi-structured interviewing and archival research (cf. Sanjek 1990: 174). One of the central aims of the thesis is indeed to show that using these methods in combination, but with an emphasis on participant observation nonetheless, is a highly effective way of studying processes of collective identity formation in social movements and their constituent organisations.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to address a range of methodological issues in social movements research and to reflect on the strengths and the limitations of the approach which I myself adopted in order to investigate SOS-Racisme. The first section outlined and then provided a critique of the French sociologist Alain Touraine's method of sociological intervention, which he devised specifically as a way of researching social movements. Although sociological intervention is undoubtedly an original and important addition to the pool of methods available to researchers, I followed several other critics in concluding that it has a number of significant weaknesses.

In the second section I began by examining the reasons for Touraine's explicit rejection of observational methods in social movements research. I then suggested, contrary to Touraine, that observation—and particularly participant observation—avoids many of the problems associated with sociological intervention. Nevertheless, participant observation alone is inadequate, especially in urban settings, and I went on finally to argue for the importance of a broader ethnographic approach in social movement research, using examples from my own Paris-based study of SOS-Racisme.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> Over the past fifteen years, however, an important debate has also developed among scholars working in Latin America (see, for example, Assies and Salman 2000; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998a; Eckstein 1989; Escobar and Alvarez 1992a; Jelin 1987; Mainwaring and Viola 1984; Moisés et al 1985; Wignaraja 1993).

<sup>2</sup> '[...] une société est un ensemble hiérarchisé de *systèmes d'action*, c'est-à-dire de rapports sociaux entre des acteurs dont les intérêts sont opposés mais qui appartiennent au même champ social, donc partagent certaines orientations culturelles.'

<sup>3</sup> 'Les hommes font leur histoire; création culturelle et conflits sociaux produisent la vie sociale et au cœur de la société brûle le feu des mouvements sociaux.'

<sup>4</sup> For brief critical discussions of Touraine's method see Ansart (1990: 263-8), Gosselin (1982), Melucci (1989: 235-9), North (1998: 565-70), Papadakis (1993: 84-89) and Touraine (1982a).

<sup>5</sup> 'Pour les femmes Alain Touraine est un homme et c'est gênant, pour nous il est Parisien et ça l'est autant. [...] De quel droit quelqu'un intervient-il dans un débat auquel il est extérieur pour «vous donner un coup de main» et augmenter votre capacité d'action?'

<sup>6</sup> After participating in Touraine's research, Lapeyronnie (along with a number of fellow activists) withdrew from his previous course of study in order to register for a degree in sociology (Lapeyronnie 1982: 28). He was subsequently to join Touraine's research centre CADIS (Centre d'analyse et d'intervention sociologiques) at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris (see, for example, Dubet and Lapeyronnie 1992; Lapeyronnie 1987, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> '[I]f the researcher is regarded as a teacher and not as a producer of knowledge, the stakes of a possible student social movement—the social uses of knowledge—cannot be accepted as such, since their identification comes from the opposing side. (*[S]i le chercheur est considéré comme le professeur et non comme le producteur de connaissances, l'enjeu d'un mouvement social étudiant possible—utilisation sociale de la connaissance—ne peut être*



*reconnu, puisque sa reconnaissance vient de l'adversaire.)'* (Lapeyronnie 1982: 27)

<sup>8</sup> Touraine does note in his response to Amiot's (1980) critique of sociological intervention that members of the intervention groups are confronted with 'interlocutors most often out of their reach (*interlocuteurs le plus souvent hors de leur portée*)' (Touraine 1980b: 427). However, he fails to consider the implications of this for his method.

<sup>9</sup> 'Le point de départ de l'intervention sociologique consiste à constituer de tels groupes, formés d'acteurs ou plus strictement de militants ...'

<sup>10</sup> The issue of the representativity of the intervention group members is, for example, raised by Amiot (1980). However, Touraine does not deal with this particular point in his response (1980b).

<sup>11</sup> See Diani and Eyerman (1992a) for a collection of essays on methodological issues by leading scholars in the social movements field.

<sup>12</sup> 'Les sociologues doivent étudier le plus directement possible des conduites collectives dans les situations les plus diverses.'

<sup>13</sup> Members of social movements may, however, view *all* social research (rather than the use of particular methods such as participant observation or sociological intervention) with some suspicion. The following two incidents which I observed during my fieldwork suggest that interview- and questionnaire-based research on social movements may be regarded as equally problematic by some actors. On one occasion I heard a French sociologist who was conducting mostly interview-based research on SOS-Racisme asked, with a laugh, by a member of the association's National Committee: 'Are you still doing your job for Special Branch? (*Tu fais toujours ton travail pour les RG [Renseignements généraux]?*)' On another occasion, I was present at SOS-Racisme's Parisian headquarters when the same researcher attempted to distribute a questionnaire to members of the association. A number of those with whom I was standing at the time refused to take the questionnaire on the grounds that it was equivalent to '*flicage*', a slang term for police surveillance.

<sup>14</sup> Similar types of objection have long been levelled at social science by left-wing critics (on many occasions, it has to be said, with some justification [see Asad 1973; Hymes 1999]). Thus Stavenhagen could note in the early 1970s that: 'We often hear it said amongst radicals that social scientific produce is really only of use to repressive governments, the exploiting classes or the self-seeking imperialists' (Stavenhagen 1993: 57).

<sup>15</sup> It could be argued with some justification, I think, that these are issues in all social research.

<sup>16</sup> This contrasts with Diani's and Eyerman's assertion that '[t]he use of participant observation ... has permitted detailed accounting of the life within particular social movement organizations, but has contributed little or nothing to the reconstruction of patterns of interaction between the totality of actors involved in the networks that make up the movement as a whole' (Diani and Eyerman 1992b: 2-3). In my view, long-term participant observation *does* have the potential to generate valuable and detailed insights into movement networks, even if researchers have not yet used it to do so. I would also suggest that it is highly debatable whether other methods have in fact been able to reconstruct interaction patterns between 'the totality of actors' involved in a movement network rather than specific sections of it.

<sup>17</sup> There is a direct parallel here with Okely's experience of participant observation among 'traveller-gypsies'. She writes: 'Housedwellers, shopkeepers and soon the police took me for a Gypsy. I learnt the Gorgios' [i.e. non-Gypsies'] responses to Gypsies by becoming the object of their fear of fantasy' (Okely 1983: 45). In my case, however, I became an object of anger or hostility, as the representative of an association perceived to be linked to the Socialist Party, rather than 'fear or fantasy'.

<sup>18</sup> The problems posed for continuous participant observation by the scattered nature of the people studied has also been noted by Simon-Barouh (1983: 157).

<sup>19</sup> The timing of the interviews was important as I was in position after fifteen months of participant observation to choose interviewees from different 'currents' within the association as well as from both local and national levels. As I knew most of the interviewees very well by this point, our discussions were more conversational and relaxed than they might have been under other circumstances (see Olivier de Sardan 1995: 90).

<sup>20</sup> 'L'analyse localisée constitue le meilleur point de départ pour toute généralisation ultérieure, mais à deux conditions: 1° qu'elle ne s'enferme pas dans des choix d'échelles limitatifs, 2° qu'elle ne prétende pas outrepasser ses compétences en court-circuitant la démarche comparative.'

## Part II : Tensions

## Chapter 5

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### Political Myths and the History of SOS-Racisme

One morning in 1994, during my fieldwork in Paris, an activist in the local committee of SOS-Racisme of which I was a member phoned me at home to say that he had spent the previous night in a police cell. He had been talking with members of several immigrant associations when the police had raided the café in which they were sitting. As his identity papers were being checked, he had entered into an argument with one of the police officers and been arrested along with an activist from one of the immigrant associations. He informed me that they were both considering lodging a complaint, and suggested that it might be a case which our committee could follow.

In due course, the committee produced a leaflet about the incident and we distributed it at a number of metro stations. However, the leaflet contained a (relatively minor) factual error and when, as the committee's representative, I attended a meeting with the other activist who had been arrested, he complained to me that this would significantly weaken their case should they decide to bring an action against the officers concerned. Brandishing a copy of the leaflet and shaking with anger, he said that it was typical of SOS-Racisme, they always '[made] a bloody mess of things (*foutent la merde*)!'

Over two years later, in July 1996, I returned to Paris to give a paper (an early version of Chapter 8) at an academic conference. My paper was included in a stream on 'Immigration and the Politics of Belonging' and focused on a debate which had taken place at a meeting of SOS-Racisme's National Council in 1994. The questions and comments which I received after delivering the paper, however, tended not to address the specific events which I had discussed but rather the nature of the circumstances surrounding the association's creation a decade earlier. Thus, a sociologist based in a French university remarked, for example, that it was 'Mitterrand and the Socialists, of course' who had been behind the launch of SOS-Racisme. This led to a brief discussion among several of the French academics present about the association's origins.

These two incidents highlight the main themes which I intend to explore in the following chapter. The first raises the issue of the relationship between SOS-Racisme and other anti-racist or immigrant organisations. How is SOS-Racisme regarded by activists in these organisations and what tensions are there between different sections of the anti-racist movement? The second draws attention to the existence of a debate about the origins of SOS-Racisme and the involvement of influential members of the Socialist Party in its launch. To what extent did Mitterrand and his advisers play a role in the creation and development of SOS-Racisme? This chapter will be concerned, therefore, with the contested history of SOS-Racisme and its controversial place within the broader anti-racist movement.

## Origin Myths

Political myths are an important aspect of the political imagination in most, if not all, human societies. This has been particularly true historically in France, where 'political upheavals have constantly been accompanied by an amazing mythological effervescence' in the period since the 1789 Revolution (Girardet 1986: 11).<sup>1</sup> Conspiracy myths and ideas of a Golden Age, for example, have emerged at regular intervals and offered ways of making sense of complex events and processes such as revolutions or industrialisation (see Girardet 1986). At a much more mundane level, but no less significantly, a number of radically different 'mythological' narratives about SOS-Racisme's origins and function have developed in the years since its creation in 1984. These accounts provide competing explanations of the association's early success and popularity, and remain important reference points in current debates. In the following sections, I examine the contested history of SOS-Racisme and show how ongoing discussion of this subject framed my own research in 1993-94.

Myths and rituals fulfil important functions for political (and other) organisations. As the political anthropologist David Kertzer has explained:

In order to have members, or even adherents, an organisation must have some way of representing itself, and it carves out a distinct identity through both mythic and ritual means. Organisations propagate myths regarding their origin and purpose, while members engage in symbolic practices that serve to mark them off from nonmembers. These myths often assert the group's superiority. (Kertzer 1988: 17-18)

Ritual practices and symbolic representations, in other words, play a key role in both creating and maintaining distinctive organisational identities.



The production of myths about SOS-Racisme's origins and the definition of its identity were crucial tasks for the association's founders, especially in the first few months of its existence. In a series of interviews with journalists, Harlem Désir and Julien Dray (the association's first president and vice-president) repeatedly emphasised the new association's originality and distinctiveness with respect to existing anti-racist and immigrant organisations, and provided accounts of its creation. Both men subsequently published books in which they developed these 'myths' in more detail. I intend to focus here on Désir's and Dray's books and to show how they present a particular construction of SOS-Racisme's history and identity.

The first to be published was *Touche pas à mon pote* by Harlem Désir (1985). The book covers the initial twelve months of SOS-Racisme's existence and also contains a brief autobiographical portrait. (It was later translated into several other European languages.) In the second chapter, a series of events is described which Désir himself refers to, without further elaboration, as 'the foundation myth of the association (*le mythe fondateur de l'association*)' (1985: 148). One evening in October 1984, Désir recounts, he and a group of student friends had arranged to meet together for a pizza. A member of the group, a Senegalese man called Diégo, arrived late and visibly upset. Diégo then explained that on his way to join them a woman in the same metro carriage had cried out that her purse had been stolen. He had been the only black person in the carriage and all the other passengers had turned and looked suspiciously in his direction. Although the woman had subsequently found her purse, Diégo had been so angered by this example of 'everyday racism (*racisme ordinaire*)' that he had resolved to return to Senegal. Désir claims that Diégo's experience convinced the other members of the group that they had to 'react (*réagir*)', and that the decision

to create a new association called SOS-Racisme was made in the days which followed (see Désir 1985: 23-5).

The other chapters of *Touche pas à mon pote* outline the ways in which the association's founders secured the support of celebrity 'sponsors (*parrains*)', succeeded in attracting media attention, and organised a series of demonstrations, concerts and other initiatives. Désir is concerned throughout to highlight SOS-Racisme's originality and distinctiveness with regard not only to established anti-racist and immigrant associations but also to political parties. Anti-racist and human rights organisations such as the LDH, LICRA and MRAP (see Glossary), for example, are criticised for their failure to prevent the rise of racism and are dismissed as 'too official, too unwieldy, too bureaucratic (*trop officiel, trop lourd, trop bureaucratique*)' (1985: 26). SOS-Racisme, on the other hand, is presented as a dynamic, youthful rejection of racism and intolerance (1985: 145). The various associations which participated in the 1983 and 1984 marches against racism and for equality (the so-called Beur movement) are portrayed, for their part, as 'the expression of the particular demands of a specific community (*l'expression des revendications particulières d'une communauté spécifique*)', i.e. North Africans in France. According to Désir, the founders of SOS-Racisme deliberately set out, in contrast, 'to ignore the traditional divisions between communities (*ignorer les clivages traditionnels entre communautés*)' and to build 'intercommunity solidarity (*une solidarité intercommunautaire*)' (1985: 103, 33).

In addition, Désir emphasises the non-partisan and moral nature of SOS-Racisme's approach, as well as its difference from traditional political organisations. The association's spokespeople made the first of these points frequently over the course of 1985, in response to allegations that SOS-

Racisme was closely linked to the Socialist Party. Thus, in a newspaper interview before the June 1985 concert in Paris, Désir stated: 'First of all, our orientation is a moral orientation. Our positions are based on a certain number of principles, which are neither partisan nor political' (quoted in *Libération*, 13 June 1985. See also Désir 1985: 145-6).<sup>2</sup> The second point is developed in *Touche pas à mon pote*, where Désir insists that SOS-Racisme has nothing in common with the 'quiet, dusty respectability (*pignon poussiéreux sur rue tranquille*)' of traditional organisations which do little more, he implies, than turn out for the annual May Day demonstration (1985: 145). Désir argues that the association's media-oriented strategy (with its reliance on concerts and badges) is more appealing to young people than conventional forms of political activism involving regular committee meetings and the distribution of leaflets (1985: 145. See also Désir's comments quoted in *Libération*, 25 March 1985.)

In most respects, the section of Julien Dray's book *SOS Génération* (1987) devoted to SOS-Racisme is very similar to Désir's earlier account in its presentation of the association's history and identity. Dray writes, for example, that SOS-Racisme was created by a 'group of friends (*bande de copains*)' in response to the emergence of the National Front and a rise in racist attacks (Dray 1987: 204). He too emphasises that 'SOS-Racisme is independent. Totally.' (1987: 216)<sup>3</sup> Like Désir, he argues that SOS-Racisme differs from 'Beur' associations in being 'a generational movement (*un mouvement de génération*)' rather than one based on a specific ethnic or religious identity (1987: 214). Dray is also concerned, finally, to highlight the originality and effectiveness of SOS-Racisme's use of concerts and other media-oriented events to involve young people in the fight against racism (1987: 208-9).

An important difference, however, is that the 'foundation myth' involving the Senegalese student 'Diégo' does not appear in Dray's book. It is replaced by an origin 'myth' or narrative of a more explicitly political nature. Whereas Désir had included relatively little on the previous activist experiences of the founder members, Dray situates the creation of SOS-Racisme in relation to his and other members' break with 'leftism (*gauchisme*)' and the 'minority action (*action minoritaire*)' of Trotskyist groups such as the Revolutionary Communist League (Dray 1987: 193, 185). He states that: 'At the start, we thought: let's take the opposite approach to the tiny [leftist] splinter groups and play the media card, completely and unashamedly' (1987: 205).<sup>4</sup> The origins of SOS-Racisme are thus traced back by Dray to his and others' dissatisfaction with the sectarian and marginal nature of far-left politics, regarded as completely divorced from the interests and preoccupations of the mass of the population (1987: 183).

A review of these two books, along with the numerous interviews with Dray and Désir which were published in newspapers and magazines in 1985 and 1986, provides valuable insights into the ways in which the founders of SOS-Racisme sought to construct not only a distinctive identity for the new association but also a particular view (or views) of its origins. Nevertheless, as Melucci has argued, the process of collective identity formation involves an interaction and negotiation between the various levels of an organisation or movement; an analysis of 'leaders' discourse' and the 'top' of collective action alone is not sufficient (Melucci 1995a: 52). It is for this reason that the present thesis combines an examination of the public statements of the association's leaders with an investigation of the local level of action and the perspectives of ordinary members.

As I have shown here, Désir and Dray actively sought, both in interviews and in their own books, to promote particular myths about the origins of SOS-Racisme as well as to identify the association's distinctiveness and assert its superiority over other anti-racist or immigrant organisations. The image of SOS-Racisme which emerged from these accounts was, however, rejected by many activists in the anti-racist and human rights movements as well as by external commentators. Almost immediately, a number of alternative narratives – or myths – about the circumstances surrounding the association's creation and about its political function began to circulate in activist circles and in the national press. These included several types of conspiracy theory.

## Conspiracy Theories

For at least the past two centuries, conspiracy theories have occupied a central place in the political imagination of European countries such as France (and elsewhere). As Girardet has noted, the 'spectre' of Jewish, Jesuit and Masonic plots to seize political power and achieve global domination has continuously 'haunted' French society over this period (Girardet 1986: 32). In his study of anti-Jesuit conspiracy theories in nineteenth century France, Geoffrey Cubitt has sought to explain the appeal of such forms of political analysis. He suggests that:

conspiracy theories do three things: explain what happens as the intended product of conscious human volition; establish the division of humanity into two opposed camps; and affirm a discrepancy between the surface appearance and the hidden reality of human affairs. For convenience, these may be called the 'intentionalist', the 'dualist', and the 'occultist' functions of conspiracy theory. (Cubitt 1993: 296-7.)

In other words, a conspiracy theory is a way of 'imagining' politics which asserts that a given event or series of events is the direct result of the deliberate action of a particular conspiratorial group; that there is a sharp contrast between this minority and the vast majority of the society's population; and that a radical difference exists between the outward appearance of the world and its true nature or reality (see also Cubitt 1989: 13-18.).

According to Cubitt, an analytical distinction can be drawn between two 'rhetorical styles' found in conspiracy theories. The first, which he describes as the 'conspirator-centred' style, is mainly concerned to identify the particular individuals involved in a conspiracy and to trace the links between them. As Cubitt notes, this style of conspiracy theory tends to be characterised by '[t]he strong odour of card-index' (1989: 20). The 'plan-centred' style, on the other hand, focuses less on cataloguing individuals than on revealing 'a sinister pattern' between apparently unconnected events. Cubitt argues that both of these styles are present in most conspiracy theories, although one or the other may predominate (1993: 296).

Over the past fifteen years, a number of 'conspiracy theories' involving allegations of political manipulation have been put forward to account for the creation and early success of SOS-Racisme (see, for example, Pfister 1988: 71-2; Closets 1990: 254-288). Perhaps the most well-known and controversial of these is contained in Serge Malik's *Histoire secrète de SOS-Racisme* (1990). An active member of SOS-Racisme from February 1985 until April 1986, Malik contests the 'official' versions of the association's origins and purpose provided by Désir and Dray. He sets out to expose the 'secret history' which, he claims, the leadership has concealed both from ordinary members of SOS-Racisme and from the general public. Describing the creation of the



association as 'a manipulation carried out by professionals (*[u]ne manip de pros*)', he challenges in turn the leadership's depiction of SOS-Racisme's nature, function and achievements (Malik 1990: 40).

Firstly, Malik alleges that SOS-Racisme was not the politically neutral or independent association which its founders pretended. He suggests, on the contrary, that there was a very close, even organic, relationship between SOS-Racisme (or at least its leadership) and the Socialist Party. On the one hand, he emphasises repeatedly that Dray and other leading figures were all members of the Socialist Party, and that many had been active previously in student or far left politics. On the other, he claims that two members of Mitterrand's presidential staff, Jean-Louis Bianco and Jacques Attali, were heavily involved, with Désir and Dray, in both the launch of the association and its subsequent development.<sup>5</sup> The political neutrality of SOS-Racisme, he concludes, was more 'apparent' than 'real' (1990: 79-82).

Secondly, Malik implies that the primary motivation of those who founded SOS-Racisme – Julien Dray in particular – was to further their own political careers and ambitions, and that the creation of a movement against racism and the rise of the National Front (FN) was simply a means to this end rather than a reflection of a more deep-seated commitment to the anti-racist struggle. He suggests again that appearances are deceptive, and that 'SOS-Racisme is in reality only a phantom movement. Its real function is to be the public relations office and personal pressure group of Julien Dray' (1990: 174).<sup>6</sup> In Malik's view, Dray deliberately used SOS-Racisme to build up a network of influential contacts and increase his individual standing within the Socialist Party, with the aim of eventually becoming a deputy. The ordinary people who joined SOS-Racisme to combat racism, he states

bluntly, were 'used, abused, manipulated in the exclusive service of Dray's career and the political line of the PS ' (1990: 159).<sup>7</sup>

According to Malik, Dray's calculation at the outset was that the launch of an anti-racist youth movement was likely to be the most effective means of assuring his own promotion within the Socialist Party. The PS had not been able to forge lasting links with the Franco-Maghrebian associations involved in the 1983-84 marches, and was relatively absent from the field of anti-racism. Having identified this 'opening (*créneau*)' (1990: 39), Dray then proceeded to develop the idea of SOS-Racisme and to enlist the support of key figures in the Socialist Party. As far as the Socialists were concerned, Malik asserts, the creation of SOS-Racisme appeared to offer a welcome way of capitalising on the 'Beur' movement and mobilising young potential voters in the run-up to the forthcoming legislative and presidential elections. Malik continues that SOS-Racisme's subsequent success and the role it was perceived to have played in securing Mitterrand's re-election in 1988 ensured that Dray was rewarded with a nomination as the PS candidate for a relatively safe seat in the Essonne *département* to the south of Paris in the legislative elections a few months later (1990: 158).

Finally, Malik provides an assessment of SOS-Racisme's achievements which differs significantly from that of the association's leadership. He states that 'SOS has certainly succeeded in pushing back the rising tide of Beur demands, but definitely not that of racism, nor the influence of Le Pen' (1990: 154).<sup>8</sup> In his view, the local-level, grassroots action and the concrete policy proposals developed by Franco-Maghrebian associations in the early 1980s were effectively 'destroyed (*annihilée*)' by the emergence of SOS-Racisme and its emphasis on a media-oriented form of anti-racism (1990: 154). He criticises SOS-Racisme for its reliance on slogans and concerts, and its

resulting invisibility 'on the ground (*sur le terrain*)', in housing estates and workplaces where acts of racism and discrimination occur on a daily basis (1990: 175). Indeed, Malik even claims that SOS-Racisme's leaders have contributed to a 'trivialisation (*banalisation*)' of racism by their frequent (ab)use of the term 'racist' as a way of stigmatising their opponents or for other, purely polemical reasons (1990: 167). Rather than preventing the expansion of Le Pen's National Front, he concludes, SOS-Racisme has in fact been 'the red carpet used by the far right in France to emerge from the shadows into the light' (1990: 175).<sup>9</sup>

The publication of Malik's *Histoire secrète de SOS-Racisme* in the summer of 1990 attracted a significant amount of press coverage, although this was heavily determined by the general political orientation of the newspapers concerned. The right-wing daily press, for example, seized on the book as convincing proof of the association's links with and support for Mitterrand and the Socialist Party (*Le Quotidien de Paris*, 1 June 1990; *Le Figaro*, 2 June 1990). The weekly paper of the National Front, on the other hand, carried long extracts from the book, claiming that it showed that the association had been controlled by 'Zionists' from the Jewish students' organisation UEJF (*National Hebdo*, 14-20 June 1990. See also *Aspects de la France*, 12 July 1990). The left-leaning weekly magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, however, chose to publish an interview with Harlem Désir in which he dismissed Malik's account as 'pseudo-revelations' and 'a falsified re-writing of history (*une réécriture falsifiée de l'histoire*)' (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 7-13 June 1990). Other centre-left daily and weekly publications played down the importance of the book, describing it as a fairly predictable 'settling of scores (*règlement de comptes*)' on the part of a former member of SOS-Racisme with his erstwhile fellow activists and its allegations as 'not really new (*pas vraiment nouveau*)' (*Politis*, 7-13 June 1990; *Le Monde*, 15-16 June 1990).

It is not my intention here to assess the truth or falsity of the various assertions which Malik makes in the course of his book. As I indicate in the next part of this chapter, the exact nature of the circumstances surrounding SOS-Racisme's creation continued to be the subject of claim and counter-claim throughout the period of my fieldwork and it remains difficult to draw firm conclusions even today. The point I want to emphasise is, rather, that Malik's account can be analysed as a type of conspiracy theory in which the 'conspirator-centred' style predominates. As an 'explanation' of the emergence of SOS-Racisme, I would argue, it performs the three functions (intentionalist, dualist, and occultist) which Cubitt suggests are characteristic of conspiracy theories.

Firstly, the association's rise is presented as the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of Dray and influential figures in the Socialist Party. Secondly, the small 'conspiratorial group' around Dray is sharply distinguished from the majority of activists and members of the public who, the implication is, are unaware of the 'manipulation' which is taking place. Finally, the 'official' image of SOS-Racisme – as an apolitical, spontaneous response to racism and the National Front, is contrasted with the underlying 'reality' – the association was created in order to further Dray's political ambitions by serving as an electoral tool for the Socialist Party. The emphasis throughout is on identifying the connections between, on the one hand, Dray and (to a lesser extent) Désir, and, on the other, senior figures in the Socialist Party, including Mitterrand himself. In this sense, the book adopts a 'conspirator-centred' rather than a 'plan-centred' style of argument.

An interpretation of SOS-Racisme's history in terms of political manipulation or conspiracy, however, is problematic for several reasons. As Cubitt has pointed out, one of the weaknesses of conspiracy theories is that they deny

'the improvisational element in human affairs and the intentional openness of historical outcomes' (Cubitt 1993: 314) by presenting everything as the intended outcome of conscious human action. Malik implies, for example, that SOS-Racisme's success was inevitable, after the decision had been made to launch the association. Although it is true that SOS-Racisme had the considerable advantage of massive state funding (for its first concert and similar initiatives) and relatively easy access to the media, there was no guarantee that the association would attract widespread public support. This is a point which a member of SOS-Racisme made to me in an interview. While acknowledging that the association's creation was 'a genuine political decision (*une vraie décision politique*)' on the part of a group around Dray, he added that:

What was spontaneous was people's reaction. [...] It wasn't written in stone though, even though there had been a decision to [launch the association]. People have decided to create other movements in the past but ... [The success of SOS-Racisme] even exceeded, I think, at a certain point, initial expectations .... (Tape-recorded interview with Luc, 3 October 1994)<sup>10</sup>

The association's popularity, in other words, could not simply be planned or 'decided' in advance by Dray and the other founder members. It is a recognition of this element of historical unpredictability which is absent from Malik's account. Instead, the rise of SOS-Racisme is treated as an inevitable, continuous process, consciously planned and realised from beginning to end by a small group of 'conspirators'.

The distinction which Malik draws between a 'conspiratorial' minority and a 'non-conspiratorial' majority raises a second problem. As Cubitt has shown, this kind of dualism is a characteristic feature of conspiracy theories. In the case of Malik's analysis of SOS-Racisme, however, it leads to a depiction of the association's grassroots activists and supporters as mere pawns in the

political games of Dray (to advance his career) and the Socialist Party hierarchy (to ensure Mitterrand's re-election in 1988). Represented as an undifferentiated mass, '[t]he activists' (1990: 159) are viewed by Malik only as the unwitting victims of a political manipulation, and not as actors and strategists in their own right. Malik completely ignores the fact that the existence of a range of sources of information combined with a relatively high level of general education means that citizens in contemporary Western democracies such as France are not easily manipulated by political or other elites (see Charlot 1994: 131).

Thus, there is no attempt in the book to explore the reasons for the continuing involvement of many people – including Malik himself (see *Politis*, 7-13 June 1990) – even after allegations that the Socialist Party was attempting a 'take-over (*récupération*)' of SOS-Racisme had appeared in the national press during the spring of 1985 (*Le Figaro*, 28 March 1985; *Le Quotidien de Paris*, 28 March 1985). This is an omission which the present thesis aims to address. I have already shown, in Chapter 2, that grassroots members of associations such as SOS-Racisme frequently have highly developed political perspectives and strategies of their own, and are not just puppets of their leaders. In a similar way, Chapter 8 discusses an incident in which pressure from grassroots activists forced the association's leadership to abandon plans for an electoral agreement with a prominent politician. These chapters provide a very different view of SOS-Racisme's ordinary members to the one which emerges from Malik's 'analysis'.



## An Ongoing Controversy

The circumstances surrounding the creation of SOS-Racisme in 1984 continued to be the subject of controversy at the time of my fieldwork ten years later. In the final part of this chapter I consider a number of further accounts of the association's history published in 1993 and 1994 which appeared to confirm earlier versions of events. I also discuss material taken from interviews which I conducted during this same period with representatives of other anti-racist or immigrant organisations. It highlights the extent to which the events and debates described in subsequent chapters of this thesis occurred against the background of tensions or even open hostility between SOS-Racisme and other sections of the anti-racist movement which date back to the mid-1980s.

In 1993, the former special adviser to President Mitterrand, Jacques Attali, published the first volume of his political memoirs. It contained the following entry, dated 'Monday 1 April 1985': 'Harlem Désir launches "SOS Racisme". The original idea came from Jean-Loup Salzmänn and Julien Dray, and Jean-Louis Bianco [the General Secretary of Mitterrand's Elysée staff] organised everything else' (Attali 1993: 793).<sup>11</sup> There is no elaboration of this comment, however, and the actual steps supposedly taken by Bianco to set up SOS-Racisme are left unspecified. Nevertheless, Bianco himself was interviewed on this subject in April 1994 by three journalists undertaking an investigation of Mitterrand's links with members of the far right. When the book (Faux et al 1994) was published six months later it contained a long extract from this interview. In response to a direct question about the role he played in the creation of SOS-Racisme, Bianco states: 'Personally, I tried to help them [the association's founders] to obtain funding from government ministries' (quoted in Faux et al 1994: 30).<sup>12</sup> He also admits to putting Dray

and the others in contact with Mitterrand's communications and marketing advisers.

On the basis of this and other material, the authors of the book suggest that the promotion of SOS-Racisme was in fact the second prong of a twofold electoral strategy pursued by Mitterrand in the early 1980s. The first was to facilitate the emergence of Le Pen and the National Front, in order to foster divisions within the mainstream right and split the right-wing vote. '[O]peration SOS-Racisme', on the other hand, was intended to remobilise a left-wing electorate (and the Socialist Party) around anti-racism in the context of falling opinion poll ratings. This argument is, however, rejected by Julien Dray, who is also quoted in the book. Dray denies that SOS-Racisme was the result of a 'Machiavellian calculation (*calcul machiavélique*)' on the part of Mitterrand and insists that 'the PS saw [the arrival] of SOS as a divine surprise as it did not know how to respond to the FN' (quoted in Faux et al 1994: 31).<sup>13</sup>

During my fieldwork in 1993 and 1994, therefore, the history of SOS-Racisme remained the subject of claim and counter-claim among high-ranking politicians, journalists and members of the association. Within the broader anti-racist movement at this time, the origins and role of SOS-Racisme also continued to generate heated debate. Many argued that the development of SOS-Racisme had been encouraged by the Socialist administration in the mid-1980s in a deliberate attempt to depoliticise the anti-racist struggle and to undermine the 'Beur' movement. One of the organisers of the 1983 March, who later joined SOS-Racisme for a short period, stated in an interview published in December 1993:

I think that the Beur movement failed because of political manipulation. The Socialist Party wanted a moral type of anti-racist movement: with 'Touche pas à mon pote' it was no longer a question

of the struggle for equality. I, personally, allowed myself to be taken in. (Titouss 1993: 45)<sup>14</sup>

A similar argument was put forward by Albert Lévy, a former General Secretary of the anti-racist association MRAP, when I interviewed him in 1994:

Everything was done in order to get this mass of young people with them [i.e. SOS-Racisme], but on a vague basis. That is: by definition, a festival [such as the massive free concert SOS-Racisme organised in June 1985] is the vaguest type of political event there can be. There's no analysis, it's more emotional. The slogan 'Touche pas à mon pote', too, is an emotional and not a political slogan. Thus, a political analysis of what racism is, what its causes are, and how to combat it was removed. It was replaced by this idea of what was called 'the moral generation'. So that forms part of the operation as well: to depoliticise the anti-racist movement and create an apolitical anti-racist movement. (Tape-recorded interview with Albert Lévy, MRAP, 17 November 1994)<sup>15</sup>

The suggestion here is that the 'moral' type of anti-racism promoted by SOS-Racisme was attractive to the incumbent Socialist administration because it turned attention away not only from the specific demands for equal rights formulated by 'Beur' activists but also from a socio-economic analysis of the underlying causes of racism.

The related idea that SOS-Racisme had been launched by the authorities to prevent the further development of an autonomous Franco-Maghrebian movement was also current in activist circles during the period of my fieldwork. When I myself interviewed several activists who had participated in the 'Beur' movement and then founded another association, one of them stated:

As we see it, the authorities tried to set up those associations – such as SOS-Racisme or France-Plus – because they saw that they were going to face a movement of young Arabs. It was *inconceivable*, as far as they were concerned, that there could be a movement originating

from immigrants. (In this case, here [in 1983-84], it was Maghrebians who were on the move.) For the government, that couldn't be tolerated; it was out of the question. (Tape-recorded interview with Nordine Iznasni and two other activists, CNCDP, 8 December 1994)<sup>16</sup>

Adding that he himself 'hated' SOS-Racisme, the same activist went on to provide the following assessment of SOS-Racisme's achievements:

What I find the most serious aspect ... is that, at a certain point, there was a movement of young people who were protesting against all the inequalities and all the discrimination they were facing. What is the most serious aspect is that [SOS-Racisme] has set back the movements associated with immigrants and their descendants immeasurably, by creating a cloud of smoke. They have set people back, and they have discredited the movements associated with immigrants and their descendants. And I resent them a lot for that. They have done a lot of damage politically....<sup>17</sup>

For this activist, then, the emergence of SOS-Racisme undermined the action initiated by Franco-Maghrebian activists in the early 1980s against racism and in favour of equal rights, thereby arresting the development of an autonomous Franco-Maghrebian section of the wider anti-racist movement.

A negative assessment of SOS-Racisme's contribution to the struggle against racism was also provided by a representative of an immigrant organisation whom I interviewed at this time:

After a dozen years of the existence of SOS-Racisme, nothing has changed. The simple reason for this is that SOS-Racisme has remained... The committees, if you look at SOS-Racisme's committees, where do you find them? You find them in the universities, in the big cities, in Paris for example. You are not going to find a committee in, for example, Mantes-la-Jolie [a town in the Paris suburbs], where there's trouble. You don't find a committee of SOS-Racisme there. (Yet, racism exists there on a day-to-day basis, segregation on a day-to-day basis.) Why? Because young people there do not believe in [SOS-Racisme]. [...] They think that those people [involved in SOS-Racisme] ...are not people who are close to them: they are people who are in it for something else. (Tape-recorded interview with member of CAIF, 5 December 1994)<sup>18</sup>

According to this activist, SOS-Racisme had failed to establish itself in the housing estates around cities such as Paris and was thus unable effectively to address the racism and discrimination experienced by the people living there on a daily basis. The association lacked credibility in the eyes of young people on these estates, who suspected its involvement in the anti-racist struggle to be merely a means to other political ends.

A further issue, for the then Assistant General Secretary of the anti-racist association MRAP, Alain Callès, was the way in which SOS-Racisme (and particularly its leadership) approached joint action with other organisations. When I interviewed him in December 1994, he voiced the following criticism of leading members of the association:

They have a background in the PCI – the Internationalist Communist Party [the French section of the Fourth International] – which means (and this can be found all through the history of SOS-Racisme, it is not only in relation to the MRAP) that they have methods which can be characterised as 'fearing neither God nor man' in their relations with other organisations. That is: the objective of their own organisation takes precedence over everything, regardless of engagements [previously entered into with other organisations] ...which can be broken immediately or modified, etc. (Tape-recorded interview with Alain Callès, MRAP, 5 December 1994)<sup>19</sup>

Such a procedure led, he added, to serious problems within the co-ordination committees (*collectifs*) which were formed to organise national anti-racist demonstrations and similar events.

## Conclusion

The books, newspaper articles and interview material discussed in this chapter highlight some of the tensions concerning SOS-Racisme and its place within the anti-racist movement which existed during the period of my

fieldwork. To a large extent, these date back to the association's emergence in 1984 and its controversial history. In this chapter, I have sought to provide an insight into different accounts of SOS-Racisme's creation. These continued to circulate at the time of my research and had a direct impact on how the association was viewed by other sections of the anti-racist movement. In the next chapter, I turn from the perspectives of activists to examine criticisms of SOS-Racisme within academic debates about a 'crisis' of anti-racism in contemporary France.



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> '...c'est d'une étonnante effervescence mythologique que n'ont cessé d'être accompagnés les bouleversements politiques.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Avant toute chose, notre orientation est une orientation morale. Nos prises de position partent d'un certain nombre de principes, ni partisans ni politiques.'

<sup>3</sup> 'SOS-Racisme est indépendant. Totalement.'

<sup>4</sup> 'Au départ, nous pensons : prenons le contre-pied des groupuscules pour jouer à fond a carte des médias, sans honte.'

<sup>5</sup> Bianco was was General Secretary of the Elysée staff (1982-92), Minister of Social Affairs and then Transport Minister, whereas Attali was Mitterrand's special adviser (1981-92), before becoming the President of the European Regional Development Bank.

<sup>6</sup> 'SOS-Racisme n'est en réalité qu'un mouvement fantôme. Sa véritable fonction est d'être le bureau de relations publiques et le groupe de pression personnel de Julien Dray.'

<sup>7</sup> 'Ils ont été utilisés, abusés, manipulés au service exclusif de la carrière de Dray et de la ligne politique du PS.'

<sup>8</sup> 'SOS a certes réussi à faire reculer le front brûlant de la revendication beur, mais pas celui du racisme, et certainement pas non plus l'influence de Le Pen.'

<sup>9</sup> 'SOS n'est que le tapis rouge emprunté par l'extrême droite française pour passer de l'ombre à la lumière.'

<sup>10</sup> 'Ce qui a été spontané, c'est la réaction des gens. [...] C'était pas inscrit quand même, même si la décision a été de le faire. Il y a eu d'autres mouvements qu'ont été décidé d'être faits mais ... Ca a même dépassé, je pense, à un moment donné, les espérances de départ ....'

<sup>11</sup> 'Harlem Désir lance «SOS Racisme». Jean-Louis Bianco a tout organisé à l'initiative de Jean-Loup Salzmman et Julien Dray.'

<sup>12</sup> 'Moi, j'essaie de les aider à trouver des financements des ministères.'

<sup>13</sup> '... le PS voit SOS comme une divine surprise car il ne sait pas répondre au FN.'

<sup>14</sup> 'Je pense que le Mouvement beur a échoué du fait des manipulations politiques. Le Parti socialiste voulait un mouvement antiraciste qui soit moral: 'Touche pas à mon pote, ce n'était plus le combat pour l'égalité. Personnellement, je me suis laissée prendre au bluff.'

<sup>15</sup> 'Tout était fait pour avoir avec eux cette masse de jeunes, mais sur une base floue. C'est à dire, par définition la fête c'est ce qu'il peut y avoir de plus flou comme manifestation politique. Il n'y a pas d'analyse, c'est plutôt sentimental. Le mot d'ordre 'Touche pas à mon pote' aussi est un mot d'ordre affectif et pas politique. Donc, on a évacué l'analyse politique de ce que c'est que le racisme, qu'en sont les causes, du racisme, comment le combattre. On l'a remplacé par cette idée de ce qu'on appelait 'la génération morale'. Donc ça fait partie aussi de l'opération: de dépoliticiser le mouvement antiraciste et créer un mouvement antiraciste apolitique.'

<sup>16</sup> 'Pour nous, ces associations-là – comme SOS-Racisme ou France-Plus – le pouvoir a essayé de les mettre en place parce qu'il a vu qu'en face il allait y avoir un mouvement de jeunes arabes. Pour eux, c'était *inconcevable* qu'il y ait un mouvement originaire des immigrés. (En l'occurrence, là, c'était des maghrébins, qui bougeaient.) Pour eux, il fallait pas ça, c'était pas possible.'

<sup>17</sup> 'Le plus grave, à mon sens (moi, je déteste SOS-Racisme) ...c'est qu'à un moment donné, face à toutes ces inégalités, face à toutes ces discriminations, il y avait eu un mouvement de jeunesse, qui se révoltait contre ça. Le plus grave, c'est qu'ils ont fait prendre un retard incalculable aux mouvements issus de l'immigration, en faisant un nuage de fumée. Ils ont fait prendre du retard aux gens, et ils ont discrédités les mouvements issus de l'immigration. Et pour ça je leur en veux beaucoup. Ils ont fait beaucoup de mal politiquement ....'

<sup>18</sup> 'Après une dizaine d'années d'existence de SOS-Racisme, rien n'a changé [...] C'est pour la simple raison que SOS-Racisme, c'est resté ... Les comités, si tu regardes les comités de SOS-Racisme, tu les trouves où? Tu les trouves à l'université, dans les grandes villes, par exemple à Paris. Tu ne vas pas trouver, par exemple, un comité à Mantes-la-Jolie, là où ça chauffe, tu ne trouves pas de comité de SOS-Racisme. (Pourtant le racisme y est au quotidien, la ségrégation au quotidien.) Pourquoi? Parce que les jeunes, ils n'y croient pas. [...] Ils considèrent que ces gens-là ... c'est pas des gens qui sont proches d'eux. Ce sont des gens qui font ça pour autre chose.'

<sup>19</sup> 'Ils ont une formation du PCI – Parti communiste internationaliste – ce qui fait que (ça va se retrouver tout au long de l'histoire de SOS, il ne sera pas que vis-à-vis du MRAP) ils ont des méthodes totalement 'sans foi ni loi' dans les rapports entre organisations. C'est à dire que le but de son organisation prime avant tout, et quelque soient les engagements ... qu'on peut rompre immédiatement ou modifier, etc.'

## Chapter 6

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### SOS-Racisme and the 'Crisis' of Anti-Racism

On 25 April 1996, a short article, entitled simply 'The Crisis of Anti-Racism (*La crise de l'antiracisme*)' and written by the president of SOS-Racisme, Fodé Sylla, was published in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde*. In this article, Sylla highlighted the divided nature of the anti-racist movement in France, its failure to mobilise significant numbers of the population and the damage to its credibility which resulted (Sylla 1996b). In a similar way, an increasing number of academic commentators have argued over the past twenty years that anti-racism is currently in a state of crisis, not only in France but also in other countries. The sociologist Paul Gilroy, for example, suggested in the late 1980s that the anti-racist movement in Britain was suffering from a crisis both of 'organisational forms' and 'political language' (1990: 192), and his more recent work has continued to emphasise a need to address 'anti-racism's tarnished vocabulary' (2000: 6). Social anthropologists such as Pnina Werbner (1991a), on the other hand, have discussed problems of political leadership among anti-racists in this country. In France, as Cathie Lloyd (1994) has explained, 'the crisis of anti-racism' has also been the subject of considerable debate. In particular, the inability of the anti-racist movement to prevent the rise of Le Pen and the National Front (FN) during

the 1980s and early 1990s has led to a questioning of anti-racist strategies and representations of racism (Lloyd 1994: 232).

One of the most influential writers on anti-racism in France since the mid-1980s has been the political philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff. His work has been described by a recent commentator as 'possessing a depth unequalled in the English-language literature' (Bonnett 2000: 12). In *La Force du préjugé* (1990a) and *Les Fin de l'antiracisme* (1995), Taguieff has sought to provide a 'genealogy' of the diverse forms of racism and anti-racism which have emerged in modern France, and also to identify their contradictions and inter-connections. Any study of anti-racism in contemporary France requires an engagement with Taguieff's writing, I would argue, and in this chapter I intend to provide a necessarily selective account of the main points of his critique of anti-racist action in that country since the 1970s. A discussion of Taguieff's analysis of the current 'crisis' of anti-racism in France is, in fact, particularly relevant in the context of the present study, as much of his argument takes the form of a critique of SOS-Racisme. In the following chapter, I outline Taguieff's criticisms of SOS-Racisme and consider the extent to which they are justified (see also Chapter 7).

## Taguieff's Critique of Anti-Racism

In *Les Fins de l'antiracisme* (1995), Taguieff argues that four different forms of anti-racism can be distinguished in contemporary France. The first is associated with traditional anti-racist or human rights organisations such as the MRAP, the LICRA and the LDH, and is primarily 'juridical (*juridique*)' in nature (1995: 233). The activity of these organisations, in other words, centres on bringing legal actions against parties alleged to have committed

discriminatory acts (see also Costa-Lascoux 1994a). The second type identified by Taguieff is 'political anti-racism (*antiracisme politique*)'. This refers to the development of public policies to combat racism and also to the 'discourse' of political parties on the subject (the French term *politique* can mean both politics and policy). Taguieff claims that in spite of being traditionally 'monopolised (*monopolisé*)' by the Left, political anti-racism has recently become the focus of competition between the main political parties, as the Right has attempted to appropriate anti-racist 'discourse'.

According to Taguieff, a third form emerged during the 1980s which can be described as 'media-oriented anti-racism (*antiracisme médiatique*)' (1995: 233). He argues that this type of approach was associated with prominent show-biz personalities and, more specifically, with SOS-Racisme and its first president Harlem Désir. In his view, it was replaced in the 1990s by 'exotic' or 'neo-Christian' forms of humanitarianism promoted by figures such as Bernard Kouchner, of Médecins du monde, or the Abbé Pierre, a prominent campaigner on homelessness and other issues since the 1950s (see Smith 1997). Finally, Taguieff distinguishes a 'scientific (*savant*)' form of anti-racism. He links this in particular to the role of prominent geneticists and other French scientists such as Albert Jacquard in challenging the idea of 'race' (Taguieff 1995: 233-4)

In Taguieff's view, the second and third of these – political and media-oriented anti-racism respectively – are the dominant forms in contemporary France (he is referring to the period of the early 1990s). Since the 1980s, he claims, anti-racism in France has been characterised by, on the one hand, an 'excessive popularisation through the mass media (*hypermédiatisation*)' and, on the other, a process of 'political manipulation (*instrumentalisation politique*)'. He argues, firstly, that anti-racist action during the 1980s was



'essentially a mobilisation from the top down (*pour l'essentiel une mobilisation par le haut*)' (1993: 384), centred on high-profile public rallies and staged media events, which served to undermine grassroots activism. SOS-Racisme is singled out for criticism in this connection. Taguieff asserts that the association's strategy of finding celebrity sponsors gave it 'an elitist and apolitical flavour (*un parfum à la fois élitiste et apolitique*)', and effectively reduced it to an anti-racist 'fan-club'.

In addition, he maintains that SOS-Racisme's attempt to re-launch anti-racism 'as a fashion (*comme une mode*)' which would appeal to young people was misguided in that the inevitable result was that anti-racism subsequently became unfashionable (a development which he dates from 1989) as media and popular attention turned elsewhere. The suggestion here, in short, is that SOS-Racisme was part of a process in which anti-racism was marketed like a consumer product, with a brand (the association's badge and slogan), publicity (the massive free concerts) and a telegenic and charismatic spokesperson (Harlem Désir). This was accompanied by an increased use of purportedly 'anti-racist' images in advertising and an emphasis on show business or media events as a way of combating racism (1993: 384)

The second process which Taguieff identifies is the use of anti-racism as a political tool or instrument during the 1980s. He argues that this period witnessed the transformation of anti-racism into 'a substitute political ideology (*une idéologie politique de substitution*)' for various political currents in France (1993: 378). In particular, he suggests that the governing Socialist Party turned to anti-racism, after its 1983 economic U-turn and abandonment of Keynesian reflationary policies, as a way of distinguishing itself from the mainstream Right. Whereas the Socialists had previously campaigned on the slogan of a 'break with capitalism (*rupture avec le*

*capitalisme*), its 'conversion' to monetarism at this time resulted in an effective political consensus over economic policy (see Cole 1998: 214-5 for further details). The incumbent Socialist administration, Taguieff maintains, then sought to re-create the division between Left and Right around the issue of racism and anti-racism. Its strategy was to reduce anti-racism to a mobilisation against Le Pen and the National Front. By focusing on the extreme-Right, the Socialists hoped to further weaken the mainstream Right, which was already internally divided on the subject of electoral alliances or co-operation with the National Front (Taguieff 1993: 378-9).

According to Taguieff, the result was a damaging politicisation of anti-racism which saw each of the main parties claim that only its own approach represented 'authentic' anti-racist action. He criticises this type of political anti-racism as 'an ideological corruption (*une corruption idéologique*)' of the essentially ethical and non-partisan nature of anti-racist principles. Underlying all anti-racist action, he argues, is the fundamental moral principle of 'unconditional respect for a person's human dignity (*respect inconditionnel de la dignité humaine en chaque personne*)', regardless of their ethnic background or cultural and religious beliefs. The attempt to associate this ethical principle (which transcends the Left-Right divide) with one particular political camp, he concludes, had the effect of discrediting anti-racism and weakening its symbolic value. In other words, anti-racism appeared 'compromised' as a result of its appropriation for party political ends during this period (1995: 243-4).

Against this background, Taguieff claims that there is an urgent need to clarify the 'state of crisis (*état de crise*)' in which anti-racism finds itself in contemporary France. He presents such a task as an 'authentic' anti-racist act in itself, its underlying aim being to increase the effectiveness of anti-racism

in the future. His work therefore presents what he describes as 'a reformist critique (*une critique réformiste*)' of anti-racism. This has two distinct dimensions: firstly, an 'internal' critique of the ideological contradictions and inconsistencies of anti-racist discourse and 'reasoning (*argumentation*)' in general; and secondly, an 'external' critique of the particular weaknesses and limitations of anti-racist action as this has developed in France (1993: 357). Taguieff's analysis of the crisis of anti-racism and the main elements of his critique will now be discussed (see Figure 6 for a summary of his argument in tabular form).

For Taguieff, the crisis of anti-racism in contemporary France is not simply the result of a superficial media-oriented approach and a manipulation by political elites; its causes are much more deep-seated. He claims that anti-racism's current difficulties can, in fact, be traced back to an inadequate conceptualisation of racism and to a series of ideological contradictions and mutually incompatible orientations which undermine the effectiveness of its action. These are the focus of his 'internal' critique of anti-racism. He suggests, firstly, that anti-racists have failed to appreciate the changing nature of racism since the 1970s. In his view, a distinction can be drawn between two (ideal) types of racism.<sup>1</sup> The first, which he describes variously as 'discriminatory', 'heterophobic', 'assimilationist' or 'universalist', is based on a naturalisation or 'biologisation' of difference and the idea of the superiority and inferiority of particular 'races' according to a universal scale of values. The second, which he refers to as 'differentialist', 'heterophilic', or as 'new' or 'cultural' racism, essentialises not phenotypical but cultural differences (i.e. it involves a 'culturalisation of difference'), and seeks to promote or defend cultural identities portrayed as absolute. Such neo-racism does not suggest that certain groups are biologically inferior, but rather that

**Table 6 Summary of Tagueieff's Discussion of Racism and Anti-Racism**

Type of Racism	Distinctive Features	Examples
universalist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. centrality of biological 'race' and concern with racial purity</li> <li>2. emphasis on inequality (inferiority and superiority of naturalised groups), based on universal scale of values</li> <li>3. perspective on difference: heterophobic and mixophilic (rejection of difference, assimilationism)</li> <li>4. dominant mode of expression: direct, explicit</li> </ol>	<p>Colonial Racism</p> <p>Nazism</p>
differentialist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. centrality of culture and concern with preservation of 'authentic' cultural identities</li> <li>2. emphasis on difference (protection of 'homogeneous' majority culture from contact and mixture with minority cultures), based on essentialised view of cultural differences as irreducible and absolute</li> <li>3. perspective on difference: heterophilic and mixophobic (celebration of cultural difference, inassimilability of minority cultures)</li> <li>4. dominant mode of expression: indirect, implicit/symbolic</li> </ol>	<p>Apartheid (South Africa)</p> <p>New Right (France)</p>
Type of Anti-Racism	Distinctive Features	Examples
differentialist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. response to universalist/biological racism</li> <li>2. emphasis on relativism/anti-universalism</li> <li>3. perspective on difference: heterophilic and mixophobic (differentialism and the right to be different)</li> <li>4. dominant mode of expression: pluralism</li> </ol>	<p>Pluralist Citizenship</p>
universalist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. response to differentialist/cultural racism</li> <li>2. emphasis on universalism/anti-relativism</li> <li>3. perspective on difference: heterophobic and mixophilic (assimilationism and the right to be similar)</li> <li>4. dominant mode of expression: assimilationism</li> </ol>	<p>Republican Citizenship</p>

Table 6 (cont.)

Summary of Taguieff's Discussion of Racism and Anti-Racism

Nature of Key Change Identified	Main Problems for Anti-Racism	The Way Forward for Anti-Racism
Ideological:  1. discrediting of universalist or biological racism post-1945 through association with Nazism and colonialism  2. reconfiguration of racist ideology, especially from 1970s onwards, involving New Right appropriation of theme of difference  3. emergence of differentialist racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ideological contradictions resulting from attempt to combine or fuse incompatible principles (universalism and differentialism), e.g. 'Equality in difference', 'Let's live together with our differences'</li><li>- Inappropriate or ineffective practices attributable to outdated definition of racism, political manipulation and over-reliance on media-oriented strategies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rethink universalism, with difference as 'limiting principle'</li><li>- Revitalise traditional means of integration or assimilation through grassroots activism and social policies to counter processes of socio-economic and ethnic segregation</li></ul>

they cannot be assimilated by virtue of their radical cultural difference (see Taguieff 1990a: 11-19; 1990b: 117; 1991a). Since the 1970s, Taguieff argues, the second - differentialist - type of racism (or 'neo-racism') has come to predominate in France and elsewhere. A crucial shift in racist ideology has occurred, he emphasises, from an emphasis on 'biological inequality towards a conception of cultural difference as absolute (*déplacement de l'inégalité biologique vers l'absolutisation de la différence culturelle*)' (Taguieff 1991b: 15). According to Taguieff, contemporary neo-racism can be characterised in terms of the following four features: (1) a shift away from a concern with 'race' and racial purity to culture and the preservation of 'authentic' cultural identities; (2) instead of an emphasis on inequality and the inferiority or superiority of different 'races', a focus on difference and the importance of maintaining the integrity of a culture by avoiding contact and any mixing with others; (3) use of heterophilic rather than heterophobic language, i.e. (cultural) difference is viewed positively rather than negatively; and (4) a reliance on 'symbolic' or 'indirect' (implication, inference) rather than 'blatant' or explicit means of expression (Taguieff 1991b: 43).

Now, Taguieff's argument is that the anti-racist movement has failed to take account of the recent emergence of forms of neo-racism postulating the existence of radical cultural differences between groups. He suggests that there is a 'gulf (*décalage*)' (1991b: 19) between anti-racist representations of (biological or 'discriminatory') racism inherited from the period of struggle against Nazism, on the one hand, and contemporary reconfigurations of racist ideology which essentialise cultural differences. (This is an argument which has also been developed by Gilroy [1987, 1990].) For Taguieff, the anti-racist movement is essentially operating with an out-dated or anachronistic definition of racism. In addition, however, he maintains that anti-racists have



failed to appreciate the way in which their own terms and strategies have been taken up and used against them by racists. He shows that the anti-racist idea of 'the right to be different (*le droit à la différence*)' and respect for cultural identities, which emerged in the 1950s as a challenge to assimilationism, came, in the course of the 1970s, to be appropriated by the New Right. Groups such as the Club de l'Horloge, for example, began to insist on the right to be different of 'the French', and the consequent need for 'French' culture and identity to be protected from 'foreign' influences. The logic of the right to be different, in short, was used in order to argue for racist exclusion and the inability of migrants and their descendants to assimilate (see Taguieff 1991b: 41). Taguieff argues that anti-racists have been slow to evaluate the implications of this evolution of racist ideology for their own action.

The identification of an inadequate conceptualisation of racism is, however, only one aspect of Taguieff's 'internal' critique of racism. He also highlights a series of inconsistencies and contradictions in 'anti-racist discourse (*//le discours antiraciste*)' (1993: 358). In this short section I cannot do justice to the range and depth of his analysis, and I propose to limit my discussion to the three 'contradictions' or 'dilemmas' outlined by Taguieff which are most relevant to a study of SOS-Racisme. The first is the one which Taguieff refers to as 'the "pluricultural" contradiction (*la contradiction du «pluriculturel»*)' (1993: 359). Taguieff argues that underlying the terms 'pluricultural' and 'multicultural', as used by anti-racists, is a tension between two opposing normative orientations: on the one hand, a commitment to 'the right to be different' or the need to respect specific cultural and ethnic identities 'unconditionally (*inconditionnellement*)'; and, on the other, a belief in the importance of the idea of 'hybridity (*métissage*)' and the gradual elimination of differences through a process of fusion. These perspectives do not attach

the same importance or legitimacy to ethnic and cultural difference, he insists, but they often co-exist in anti-racist discourse.

A second problem identified by Taguieff is 'the contradiction of the mixophile position (*[l]a contradiction de la position mixophile*)' (1993: 363). Whereas racist ideologies have tended to regard cultural or 'racial' mixing in a highly negative way ('mixophobia [*mixophobie*]'), Taguieff argues, anti-racists have often celebrated forms of hybridity ('mixophilia [*mixophilie*]'). Again, however, Taguieff claims that a contradiction between two incompatible orientations underlies this position. The first can be described as an 'egalitarian' mixophilia in that it stresses that everyone is, genetically speaking, a hybrid. It asserts that the 'mixophobia' of racism is absurd (*un non-sens*) in scientific terms. The second is an 'elitist' conception of hybridity in the sense that it is viewed as superior, either aesthetically or culturally. Taguieff argues that this second orientation presupposes that there are 'pure', i.e. non-mixed 'races' or cultures, and thus involves a form of racism itself. Anti-racists have tended, he suggests, to advance these two opposing conceptions of hybridity.

A third tension is the one which Taguieff labels 'the dilemma of differentialist hypertolerance and the assimilationist conception of citizenship (*[l]e dilemme de l'hypertolérance différentialiste et de la conception assimilationniste de la citoyenneté*)' (1993: 365). He states that anti-racists have tended to appeal to two different visions of a future society in order to legitimate their action, and that these perspectives involve opposing conceptions of citizenship. On the one hand, he argues, anti-racists claim to work towards 'a pluricultural society' in which cultural differences are tolerated or valued (he describes this as 'a heterophile pole [*un pôle hétérophile*]'); on the other, they promote the idea of republican citizenship

based on the assimilation of minority groups into the majority culture ( 'a heterophobic pole [*un pôle hétérophobe*]'). These imply different definitions of the political community, and of the relationship between minority and majority populations. Taguieff argues that anti-racism during the 1980s (and he appears to be thinking particularly of France) attempted to achieve a synthesis or combination of these two contradictory perspectives. The development of anti-racism in this period, he concludes, was characterised by a 'perpetual movement between [these] two poles (*mouvement perpétuel entre les deux pôles*)' (1993: 366).

The 'external' critique of anti-racism developed by Taguieff focuses on the types of action undertaken by the contemporary French anti-racist movement, rather on than the internal contradictions or inconsistencies of anti-racist discourse in general. Taguieff is particularly concerned to show the difference between the French movement's stated objectives and the effects or results produced by its action. Again, it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive summary of Taguieff's argument (which can be found in Taguieff [1993: 371-387]). As before, I will simply highlight those points which are most relevant to the present discussion.

Firstly, Taguieff argues that the media-oriented anti-racism which emerged in France during the 1980s failed to achieve its main objective. He claims that anti-racism in this period was 'essentially an anti-Le Pen movement (*pour l'essentiel un mouvement antilepéniste*)' (1993: 371), but that it proved incapable of preventing the National Front from steadily increasing its share of the vote at various elections over the course of the decade. The anti-racist movement was unable to stop the National Front from becoming a feature of the French political landscape. Secondly, Taguieff accuses 'media-oriented' anti-racism of 'a dogmatic anti-nationalism (*un antinationalisme*

*dogmatique*)' (1993: 386). He claims that the 'cosmopolitan' anti-racism of French elites has tended to equate nationalism with racism, and to stigmatise and 'criminalise (*criminaliser*)' an attachment to the nation-state. In his view, this has allowed the National Front to exploit the themes of national identity and republican citizenship unchallenged.

Finally, Taguieff maintains that the anti-racist movement in France has resorted to out-dated or inappropriate forms of action to achieve its goals. A juridical form of anti-racism – reliance on anti-discrimination legislation to sanction racist writings or utterances – was effective in the 1970s, he acknowledges, when its target was small neo-Nazi or neo-Fascist groupings existing on the fringes of French society. However, it was 'powerless (*impuissant*)' a decade later to combat the National Front, a mass party regularly able to attract 10-15% of the vote at national elections. Taguieff is also critical of 'the mental tools (*l'outillage mental*)' which anti-racists use to analyse contemporary forms of racism. He argues that these were forged during the struggle against Nazism and biological racism, and are not adequate for understanding more recent forms of neo-racism discussed earlier (1993: 373).

How, then, does Taguieff propose that anti-racism should be 'reformed'? Firstly, he emphasises that the anti-racist movement should learn from its recent mistakes. In particular, it should avoid 'the differentialist dead-end (*l'impasse différentialiste*)' represented, in his view, by a commitment to 'the right to be different' (1993: 387). Secondly, he suggests that effective anti-racist action requires engaging 'racists' in a rational debate in which the inconsistencies, false logic, lies and stereotypical thinking of their arguments can be revealed. Rather than indignation or the vilification of 'racists', he

contends, the way forward lies in 'critical reason (*la raison critique*)' (1993: 388).

Thirdly, and most importantly, Taguieff argues that anti-racists must begin to address the underlying causes of racism in a more direct and systematic way. Indeed, he insists that there is a need to '*shift the emphasis* of the struggle against racism from an instrumental rhetorical confrontation to a *transformation* of the conditions or factors governing its appearance' (1993: 391, *emphases in original*).<sup>2</sup> A 'realistic' anti-racism, he maintains, requires the replacement of a purely 'defensive' approach, designed to contain or isolate the National Front, with an 'offensive' strategy based on 'a logic of prevention (*une logique de la prévention*)'. This involves a greater emphasis on 'civic education (*éducation civique*)', that is, discussion in schools about the nature of civic life and about the politico-legal framework which defines French citizenship. According to Taguieff, this needs to be accompanied by social policies designed to counter processes of socio-economic and ethnic segregation which can prepare the ground for the development of racism. He argues that anti-racism should be broadened (or 'de-specified') so as to represent the fight against all forms of discrimination and segregation. Only then, he concludes, will anti-racism be able to tackle the root causes of racism, and in so doing begin to emerge from its current 'crisis' (1993: 389-92).

### The Limits of Taguieff's Critique of SOS-Racisme

The pioneering nature of Taguieff's work on anti-racism is undeniable. He has provided the most comprehensive and systematic treatment of the topic in French, and there are as yet no studies of comparable depth and historical

scope written in English. In the last section, it is worth repeating, I highlighted only those aspects of his analysis which are pertinent to the discussion of SOS-Racisme developed in this thesis; a less selective summary of his arguments would have required several chapters. In a similar way, the aim of the present section is not to produce an exhaustive assessment of Taguieff's work, but simply to reflect critically on the particular points which I have just outlined. While recognising the importance of his contribution, I want in fact to draw attention to a number of problems with Taguieff's analysis of the crisis of anti-racism in contemporary France. More specifically, I want to suggest that many of his criticisms of SOS-Racisme are misplaced. An examination of his critique of SOS-Racisme is, nevertheless, extremely valuable as it helps to clarify the nature of the association's development and the challenges which faced it in the early 1990s.

A first issue is Taguieff's portrayal of anti-racism in France during the 1980s as 'essentially' a media-oriented movement aimed at preventing the rise of Le Pen and the National Front (Taguieff 1996b: 293). In my view, this presents an unjustifiably narrow and partial characterisation of the anti-racist movement at the time. It completely ignores, for example, the action of young Franco-Maghrebians against racism and for equal rights in the 1983 and 1984 Marches and subsequently in a host of local associations (Bouamama 1994; Abdallah 2000). Similarly, it marginalises the contribution of more established but less visible anti-racist organisations such as the MRAP and the LDH (House 1997; Lloyd 1998).

In effect, Taguieff reduces the anti-racist movement to one particular organisation, SOS-Racisme, whose action he defines as primarily media-based and directed against the National Front. Although, as I noted in Chapter 3, the tendency to equate SOS-Racisme with the anti-racist



movement as a whole is fairly widespread in the literature, it does lead to analytical confusion. In the case of Taguieff here, the result is a misleading and one-dimensional representation of anti-racist action in France during the 1980s. Moreover, it could be argued that Taguieff also presents a caricatured, even stereotypical view of SOS-Racisme. Now, it is undeniable that the association has attached – and continues to attach – great importance to building an effective media strategy (see Chapter 5 and also Ossman-Dorent 1988; Hanine 1992; Juhem 1999). However, this is by no means the only way in which it has attempted to combat racism. As the brief historical sketch of SOS-Racisme provided in Chapter 1 showed, from an early stage the association was involved in debates about citizenship, nationality law and 'integration' policies. It has also attempted to promote grassroots action in suburban housing estates through the Maison des Potes and OBU initiatives, as well as in other areas through its network of local committees (see Chapter 2). The extent to which these strategies have been effective is open to question, but this does not alter the fundamental point that the association has not simply relied on media events nor focused exclusively on the struggle against the National Front.

Secondly, it is undoubtedly the case that Taguieff's distinction between four different forms of anti-racism – media-oriented, political, juridical and scientific – is an important attempt to clarify the diverse nature of contemporary anti-racist discourses and practices (1995: 261). However, when he comes to analyse the 'crisis' of anti-racism, he does not always make clear whether he is referring to one or all of these. There is frequently a slippage from a specific type of anti-racism to anti-racism more generally, even within the same paragraph (see, for example, 1993: 386). Moreover, despite being the main focus of Taguieff's critique, 'media-oriented anti-racism' is never satisfactorily defined. To what does it refer? Taguieff writes

that it is 'illustrated (*illustré*)' by SOS-Racisme (1995: 233), and on occasion he uses the phrase interchangeably with 'rhetorical anti-racism (*antiracisme rhétorique*)' (1993: 371). However, the precise nature and limits of a 'media-oriented' form of anti-racism are not specified. Instead, it is simply denounced. This raises the possibility that the idea of a 'media-oriented' anti-racism is intended to function more as a rhetorical device for polemical purposes than as an analytical tool.

Thirdly, Taguieff discusses the 'political manipulation' of anti-racism in France during the 1980s only in general terms, without exploring fully the mechanisms by which it was supposedly accomplished. He argues that anti-racism was used by 'certain currents and [...] certain formations – and not only on the Left (*certaines courants et [...] certaines formations – et pas seulement à gauche*)' as a means of forging a distinct identity in a period of ideological convergence between the main parties on matters of economic policy. It is clear, nevertheless, that Taguieff's main target is the Left and 'essentially the Socialists in power (*pour l'essentiel, les socialistes au pouvoir*)' (1996a: 16-7). What is missing, however, is a detailed analysis of the links between left-wing parties and the anti-racist movement. 'Anti-racism', 'the Left' and 'the Socialists' are not homogeneous entities, nor is there a straightforward relationship between them. On the contrary, a range of different perspectives on the anti-racist struggle exist on the Left, and even within the Socialist Party itself opposing currents or factions have historically approached anti-racism in different ways (see Geisser 1997). Conversely, anti-racist activists do not necessarily share the same conception of how their action relates to a broader political project, as I showed in Chapter 2. The complex relationships between sections of the anti-racist movement, on the one hand, and the political party system, on the other, are simply not addressed in Taguieff's work.

Important aspects of Taguieff's characterisation of the anti-racist movement in France during the 1980s are, therefore, open to question. His 'internal' critique of anti-racism's representations of racism and ideological contradictions can also be criticised on a number of grounds. The first of these relates to the concept of the 'new racism' or 'neo-racism'. This notion has been the focus of considerable debate for almost two decades now and it not my intention to review the extensive literature on the subject here.<sup>3</sup> However, it is perhaps worth noting that there are several reasons for treating the notion with some caution.

In my view, firstly, the 'new-ness' of cultural forms of racism remains to be established. Taguieff himself states at one point that differentialist racism emerged in Western Europe in the 1970s (1991b: 39), although elsewhere he claims that biological racism has been 'almost a rarity' since the Nazi period, citing the example of the apartheid regime in South Africa and its use of the notion of cultural differences to legitimate the idea of 'separate development' (1991b: 34). Silverman (1992) has suggested that an essentialised notion of culture can be traced back even further, to the formation of the modern French nation-state and definitions of republican citizenship. A second issue is whether it is correct to speak, as Taguieff does, of two different types of racism – discriminatory and differentialist. The French sociologist Michel Wieviorka has argued strongly that there are not two 'types' but rather two different 'logics' of racism which can be related in complex ways in any concrete manifestation of the phenomenon (see Wieviorka 1993b, 1994, 1997b). To be fair, Taguieff is himself aware of this possibility, although he continues to refer to two (ideal) 'types' of racism (1995: 260).

In the last section, I outlined three of the ideological contradictions which Taguieff claims can be detected in 'anti-racist discourse'. A detailed analysis

of SOS-Racisme's public statements, I would argue, does not always support Taguieff's conclusions. The first contradiction described above was between on the one hand, a commitment to the preservation of cultural differences and, on the other, an emphasis on hybridity and cultural or 'racial' mixing. Although Taguieff's argument about this 'pluricultural contradiction' may be valid for other sections of the anti-racist movement in France, it does not appear to apply to SOS-Racisme. As the next chapter shows, SOS-Racisme has fairly consistently adhered to the second of these positions, in spite of a widespread perception (which Taguieff appears to share) that it has oscillated between 'multiculturalism' and 'integration'.

SOS-Racisme's evolution over the course of the 1980s did not, I suggest in Chapter 7, involve an alternation between 'heterophobic' and 'heterophilic' perspectives on difference. There was instead a fundamental continuity in the association's vision of 'the ideal society'. Although it moved from the language of multiculturalism and hybridity (*métissage*) in the mid-1980s to a stress on integration by the end of the decade, I claim that a republican assimilationist model of social cohesion was present throughout. On the other hand, as I show in the same chapter, the way in which SOS-Racisme's spokespeople have appealed to hybridity in their campaigns does reveal a slippage between an egalitarian and an elitist conception of this notion.

In a similar way, I would argue that aspects of Taguieff's 'external' critique of anti-racist action in contemporary France are unconvincing. In the first place, his conclusion that anti-racism in France during the 1980s failed 'according to its own norms (*selon ses propres normes*)' (1993: 371) assumes that it was indeed 'essentially' a movement against the rise of Le Pen and the National Front. Now, as I have suggested above, this is a simplistic and partial characterisation of the anti-racist *movement* – as opposed to specific

organisations – during this period. Even accepting, for the sake of argument, a depiction of the anti-racist movement in these terms, is it legitimate to imply, as Taguieff does in places (e.g. 1996a: 14), that anti-racist activists bear the brunt of the responsibility for failing to prevent the continued expansion of the far-Right? As Fodé Sylla, then president of SOS-Racisme, argued in the newspaper article mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter:

Our role is to lead public debate, to influence people's opinions, but it is not up to us to make [political] decisions. If the National Front still exists today, it is above all because integration policies have not been carried through. (Sylla 1996b)<sup>4</sup>

Whether or not one shares the specific conclusion drawn by Sylla, it is certainly the case that politicians bear a significant, if not the primary responsibility, for either actively promoting or failing to impede the progression of the National Front.<sup>5</sup> While this is not to deny that anti-racists in France may have committed significant errors, some of which Taguieff has undoubtedly correctly identified, it is too simplistic to imply that the increasing influence of the far-Right during the 1980s was due in large part to a 'crisis' of the anti-racist movement.

Nevertheless, Taguieff is surely correct to draw attention to the limited effectiveness of a recourse to legal sanctions (a 'juridical' form of anti-racism) in the face of the emergence of the National Front as a mass political party. The idea that the National Front should or even could simply be banned, one which has resurfaced periodically over the past fifteen years (e.g. Amard et al 1997), is deeply problematic for the reasons which he outlines. Similarly, it is true that the anti-racist movement has not always accurately analysed changing configurations of racist ideologies in the recent period. However, Taguieff's suggestion (1993: 386-7) that anti-racists simply abandoned the idea of national identity and the nation-state as a framework for the

elaboration of political identities is, I would argue, simply wrong. On the contrary, anti-racist organisations such as SOS-Racisme played a key role in debates over national identity throughout the 1980s. In particular, they actively contributed to the development towards the end of the decade of a form of republican nationalism centred around the idea of a specifically republican model of integration (see Chapter 7). Whereas for Taguieff (1996c: 65) such an integrationist (or assimilationist) approach forms part of the solution to the 'crisis' of anti-racism, I will argue instead that it is deeply problematic as the basis for an effective anti-racist strategy.

This leads, finally, to Taguieff's recommendations for the 'reform' of anti-racism in France. As noted above, one of his main proposals is for a re-orientation of anti-racism so that it is defined more broadly as the fight against all forms of discrimination. He calls in particular for social policies to tackle socio-economic and ethnic segregation, as an 'indirect' way of preventing the emergence of racism, as well as greater attention to civic education (1996c: 12). Here again, however, I would argue that Taguieff's criticism is misplaced, for the simple reason that anti-racist associations such as SOS-Racisme had already re-oriented their action in this direction by the late 1980s.

SOS-Racisme, for example explicitly sought, from 1987 onwards (and in a more limited way before that), to promote anti-racism through the activity of a network of neighbourhood committees as well as through high-profile, national media events (Désir and SOS-Racisme 1987). Similarly, the association repeatedly called on successive Socialist governments of the late 1980s and early 1990s to introduce 'integration' policies and to improve the living conditions and economic prospects of people living in suburban housing estates (see, for example, *Le Monde*, 5 April 1988; *Le Quotidien de*



Paris, 11 September 1989; *Le Monde*, 28 April 1990). It was also actively involved in the annual 'Week of education against racism (*Semaine d'éducation contre le racisme*)' in schools (see Rollot 1991), part of what Taguieff would consider civic education. In these ways, I would argue, sections of the anti-racist movement in France, including SOS-Racisme, had already moved to an 'indirect' approach to the struggle against racism (through socio-economic and other policies) some years before Taguieff published his critique.

The problems which I have identified with Taguieff's analysis of the crisis of anti-racism, and with his critique of SOS-Racisme in particular, draw attention to the main weakness of his approach. This is its lack of grounding in a sociological understanding of the heterogeneous nature and evolution of the anti-racist movement and its action in contemporary France. He presents a highly selective account of anti-racism, which ignores whole sections of the anti-racist movement and shows little appreciation of developments after (around) 1985. Although he claims to develop an 'external' critique of anti-racist action 'as it is conducted (*telle qu'elle est conduite*)' (1993: 357), he provides little empirical analysis of what it is anti-racists actually do. Indeed, as Alastair Bonnett has recently noted: 'Taguieff's illustrations of anti-racist activity are suspiciously sketchy and abstract' (Bonnett 2000: 167). To a certain extent this is inevitable, given the dearth of sociological research on anti-racism which I acknowledged in the introductory chapter.

Nevertheless, Taguieff tends to rely almost exclusively on newspaper and magazine interviews with the spokespeople of leading anti-racist organisations such as SOS-Racisme. These are useful, but only up to a point. In particular, they rarely give an insight into the perspectives and 'discourse' of grassroots activists (or sympathisers) as opposed to those of the leaders;

nor do they provide an adequate account of the range and complexity of actual anti-racist practice. For these reasons, I would argue, Taguieff's reliance on such sources as the basis for an 'external' critique of anti-racist action (as opposed to an analysis of anti-racist 'discourse') is problematic. In this thesis, in contrast, I attempt to evaluate the 'discourse' and practice of SOS-Racisme through a detailed, ethnographic study of the association's actual activity at both a national and a local level. As later chapters will reveal, this approach produced material which suggested very different conclusions to those of Taguieff on the 'crisis' of anti-racism in contemporary France.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the contribution of the political philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff to debates about the 'crisis' of anti-racism in contemporary France. Taguieff's analysis of the contradictions of anti-racist 'discourse' and the weaknesses of current forms of anti-racist action is the most comprehensive and systematic discussion of the subject in French (there is no work of comparable historical and philosophical depth to date in English). As I have argued in this chapter, however, the critique of anti-racism in France during the 1980s and early 1990s which Taguieff presents is, to a significant extent, based on a one-dimensional and now out-dated characterisation of the anti-racist movement in that country. Many of his criticisms of SOS-Racisme, in particular, ignore the ways in which the association has developed since the mid-1980s. In the light of this, one of the central aims of the present thesis is to examine the strengths and the limitations of the association's contribution to the struggle against racism in

the mid-1990s on the basis of an in-depth sociological study of its development over an eighteen-month period.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> The anthropologist Verena Stolcke has made a similar distinction between 'traditional racism' and 'cultural fundamentalism' (Stolcke 1995: 7-8).

<sup>2</sup> '...déplacer la lutte contre le racisme de l'affrontement rhétorique instrumental à la *transformation* des conditions ou des facteurs présidant à son surgissement.'

<sup>3</sup> In Britain, Martin Barker was one of the first commentators to formulate the concept of 'the new racism' (Barker 1981, 1983; Barker and Beezer 1984. Cf. Ben-Tovim 1978). Both the usefulness and the limitations of Barker's analysis have been discussed at length in the literature (see, for example Gilroy 1987: 43-71; Miles 1989: 62-66, 1993: 71-78; Brah 1996: 165-170; Solomos and Back 1996: 16-22). Apart from Taguieff, and to a lesser extent Wieviorka, the other French theorist to have made an important contribution to the development of the concept of neo-racism is Colette Guillaumin (Guillaumin 1995). For a critical overview of the French debates, see Silverman 1999: 40-65). Of course, the idea of 'cultural racism' had been used by Frantz Fanon as early as the 1950s (Fanon 1970).

<sup>4</sup> 'Notre rôle est de mener le débat public, d'agir sur les consciences, mais les décisions ne nous appartiennent pas. Si le Front national existe encore aujourd'hui, c'est avant tout parce que les politiques d'intégration n'ont pas été menées.'

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the factors underlying the emergence and development of the National Front, including the role played by mainstream political parties of both Left and Right, see Singer (1991), Simmons (1996) and Declair (1999).

## Chapter 7

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# National Identity, Multiculturalism and Integration

This chapter examines SOS-Racisme's contribution to public debates about national identity and immigration in France during the 1980s, focusing on its interpretation of the concepts of multiculturalism and integration. As will become apparent in the discussion of the 'headscarf affair' presented in Chapter 10, the promotion of integration remained a central objective of the association during the period of my fieldwork (1993-4), informing both its policy proposals and public pronouncements. The aim of the present chapter is to explore the often subtle shifts in the terminology employed by SOS-Racisme in the period from its creation in 1984 to the publication, in 1990, of its 'Manifesto for Integration (*Manifeste pour l'intégration*)' (SOS-Racisme 1990). Certain commentators have viewed the association's development during these years in terms of a rupture, a move away from multiculturalism towards a commitment to a Republican model of integration. However, the account which I present below highlights the fact that, beneath the shifts in vocabulary which undoubtedly occurred in the late 1980s, the way in which SOS-Racisme 'imagined' (Anderson 1983) the French nation remained fairly constant.

## National Identity and Republican Traditions

In a now classic study of the origins and development of nationalism, Benedict Anderson argues that the nation is 'an imagined political community'. It is 'imagined' in the sense that members of a nation, who may never have direct, personal contact with each other, nevertheless conceive of themselves as sharing a particular national bond or sense of belonging. Anderson is not, therefore, suggesting that nations are false or somehow illusory. His point, rather, is that they are created or constructed ('imagined') entities. Nations can be distinguished in terms of the different ways or 'styles' in which this process of imagining occurs (1983: 15).<sup>1</sup>

More recently, Françoise Lorcerie has articulated a similar conception of national identity. In a discussion of the active role played by French social scientists in debates about national identity in the early 1990s, she states that:

National identity is the (emergent) result of countless daily accomplishments by the national population. Taken as a whole, these accomplishments constitute the process of *identisation* of the national population. Among these accomplishments, certain are deliberate symbolic actions aiming at the identity of the national 'we': they constitute 'assertions (*prises*)' of national identity. (Lorcerie 1994: 276)<sup>2</sup>

The construction and maintenance of a national identity, in other words, is a continuous, and symbolic, process in which specific representations of the national collectivity are asserted or, in a more literal translation of Lorcerie's phrase, 'seized'. She argues that the struggle to impose a particular conception of national identity is a crucial aspect of politics in democratic states (1994: 277).

One of the ways in which such identities are 'imagined' or symbolised, and continuity with the past claimed, is through the invention of national traditions. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm has explained:



We should not be misled by a curious, but understandable, paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion. Whatever the historic or other continuities embedded in the modern concept of 'France' and 'the French' – and which nobody would seek to deny – these very concepts themselves must include a constructed or 'invented' component. (Hobsbawm 1983a: 14)

The invention of a national (or other type of) tradition may have one of three important political functions. Firstly, it can be a way of defining group membership or solidarity. Secondly, the invention of a tradition may help to legitimise specific institutions, social statuses or types of social relationship. Finally, an invented tradition can play a role in the process of socialisation, as a vehicle for the transmission of beliefs and values (Hobsbawm 1993a: 9).

There is now a sizeable literature on the invention of national traditions not only in Western Europe but also elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, as David McCrone has pointed out, there exists an imbalance in the way in which the concept of 'invented tradition' has usually been applied: 'The "construction" of tradition is often a charge made against new or oppositional nationalisms rather than those of the "centre" whose traditions are deemed matters of fact, because they are matters of power' (1998: 44). McCrone emphasises that it is necessary to analyse the invention of tradition by nationalisms at the political 'centre' as well as the periphery. This is an important argument, and one which informs the present chapter's examination of the 're-invention' of the Republican tradition in France during the 1980s.

My point of departure here is a recognition that the process of national identity construction through the invention of traditions is not confined to 'the genesis of Nation-states (*la genèse des États-nations*)' (Lorcerie 1994:

247). In the case of France, three key periods (at least) can be distinguished in the past century and a half. The first is the early years of the Third Republic (1870-1940), when a major invention of 'Republican' traditions (the institution of the secular school, ceremonies and monuments) occurred. As Hobsbawm has shown, these played a crucial role in legitimising and mobilising support for a relatively fragile social order (Hobsbawm 1983b: 269-73).

The period after the Second World War can be considered a second important phase of national identity construction or, in Lorcerie's phrase, 'national identisation'. In *Deconstructing the nation: immigration, racism and citizenship in modern France* (1992), Max Silverman has analysed the way in which the idea developed at this time that France had had a long and successful history of assimilating immigrants and that it had only been relatively recently, and with the arrival of non-European immigrants, that an assimilation 'problem' had emerged. Silverman claims that:

The retrospective use of assimilation [was] part of a reformulation of the nation and nationalism after the war, especially around Gaullism: that is, grafting a retrospective unity, uniformity and continuity on to the image of the nation after the chasm of occupation and collaboration. (Silverman 1992: 106)

A distinction was drawn between the 'unproblematic' assimilation of European immigrants in the past and the inability of contemporary African and other non-European migrants to assimilate. This formed part of the racialisation of immigration in the post-war period, and depended on a reconstruction or 're-invention' of a tradition of assimilation which effectively ignored historical tensions around migration and the place of immigrants in French society (Silverman 1992: 95-106).

The third, and most recent, period in the re-invention of a French national

identity, I would argue, is the 1980s and early 1990s. In an important article, Françoise Lorcerie (1994) has analysed the way in which the theme of integration was taken up at the beginning of the 1990s within the social sciences, giving rise to a mass of publications on immigration, the nation and national identity. She argues persuasively that the debate on integration among social scientists in France during the period 1989-1993 contributed to the (re-)articulation of a specifically 'Republican' national identity. Lorcerie analyses the 'assertions of national identity (*prises d'identité nationale*)' contained in the work of a number of prominent French social scientists, and suggests that these authors played a key role in defining and propagating a 'Republican nationalist' version of the nation. In particular, this involved the development of the notion of a distinctively 'French' model of national integration based on citizenship, rather than ethnicity, and Republican values (see Lorcerie 1994: 257ff.). In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that SOS-Racisme contributed to this process through a series of high-profile 'assertions (*prises*)' of national identity, in relation to concepts of hybridity and integration, during the second half of the 1980s.

## Multiculturalism, Hybridity and Difference

The relationship between national identity and immigration emerged as a central issue of public debate in France during the 1980s, in part as a result of the rise of the National Front (see Taguieff 1994; Schnapper 1994). This led to a discussion among both anglophone and francophone scholars working on France about key themes such as 'the right to be different (*le droit à la différence*)' and the 'integration' of immigrants. In general terms, anglophone writers have tended either to defend the former notion (Fysh 1998; Vichniac 1991), or to emphasise the problematic nature of the integration concept in

current French debates (Silverman 1992; Blatt 1995, 1997). Their francophone counterparts, on the other hand, have usually been sharply critical of 'the right to be different' (Taguieff 1990a; Guillaumin 1995; Belghoul 1984), but rather more positive about the integrationist 'model' (Weil and Crowley 1994).

However, a number of prominent French or francophone sociologists have recently started to reflect upon the possible relevance for France of debates about multiculturalism taking place in countries such as the United States, Canada and Britain (see Wieviorka 1996a; Semprini 1997; Martiniello 1997). In *Vers un multiculturalisme français* (1996) the anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle has also broached this subject, although drawing on quite different sources (the historiography of France and African ethnography). In both cases, a focus on the theme of multiculturalism is presented as a 'necessary' response to two phenomena: the 'crisis' of the Republican model of integration discussed later in this chapter and the emergence and expansion of Le Pen's National Front (Wieviorka 1996b: 6-7; Amselle 1996: 12-18).

Current social scientific interest in multiculturalism is, nevertheless, occurring largely in the absence of wider public debate of the issue. This situation is no doubt a logical extension of the gap between academic and public opinion on the more general question of integration which has been noted by other researchers (see House 1995: 79). Nevertheless, it stands in marked contrast to the early 1980s, a period which witnessed prolonged and at times acrimonious public debate about multiculturalism but produced comparatively little social scientific discussion of the subject. In the first section of this chapter I want to examine the nature of SOS-Racisme's contribution to the exploration of multiculturalism which occurred in France in the years following the Socialists' victory at the 1981 presidential and

legislative elections.

An examination of SOS-Racisme's public pronouncements in the period immediately following the association's creation in 1984 reveals the extent to which its founders were still in the process of developing a coherent and consistent vocabulary with which to address questions of anti-racism and ethnic diversity. A newspaper report on the association's first press conference, for example, attributes the following comment to Harlem Désir:

our basic step was a desire to start from what each of us was experiencing around them to show that *assimilation* is possible, that *multiraciality* is sometimes experienced positively. That it is good to live with foreigners, that it is a way of travelling without going anywhere and that it is beneficial for society [...]. They [secondary school students] are experiencing the *multicoloured* society here and now. (*Libération*, 20 February 1985, my emphases)<sup>3</sup>

Although the term assimilation was to be avoided in subsequent interviews, early statements by SOS-Racisme's leadership continued to juxtapose references to a 'multicoloured', 'multiracial', 'multiconfessional' and 'multicultural' France (see, for example, Désir 1985: 144-5). It was only in the second half of 1985 that the association's spokespeople began to place greater emphasis on the notion of multiculturalism and consequently to employ the adjectives 'multicoloured' and 'multiracial' with less frequency.

One of the problems involved in assessing SOS-Racisme's interpretation of multiculturalism is that the association never published a manifesto-type statement of its position, as it was subsequently to do in relation to 'integration'. Moreover, the association used the term for a relatively short period of time, roughly from the spring of 1985 until the autumn of 1986 when it began to be replaced by the concept of integration (e.g. *Le Matin*, 30-31 August 1986). As a result, it is necessary to reconstruct SOS-Racisme's understanding of the nature of a multicultural society from brief references

in newspaper interviews and other published sources.

However, it remains difficult to determine the positive meaning which members of the association attached to the idea of multiculturalism. In an interview in 1990, for example, Harlem Désir argued that SOS-Racisme never defined multiculturalism in the 'Anglo-Saxon' sense of the co-existence of relatively closed 'communities' (1990: 47). This statement is problematic for a number of different reasons. In the first place, it provides only a negative definition of the association's conception of multiculturalism which does little to clarify the issue. Secondly, it assumes that there is a single interpretation of 'multiculturalism' in 'Anglo-Saxon' countries. As Marable (1995: 119) has emphasised, however, there are 'strikingly different and sometimes conflicting interpretations' of the meaning of multiculturalism in The Netherlands, Britain and the United States.

Nevertheless, an examination of SOS-Racisme's early statements highlights two main points. Firstly, the association emphasised that France was a multicultural society in the sense that young people from different 'communities' lived together in the same housing estates, attended the same schools and pursued similar leisure activities. As Bouamama (1994: 119) has indicated, this was a point which had previously been highlighted by the organisers of Convergence 84 (see also Chapter 1 of this thesis). According to the leadership of SOS-Racisme, however, the originality of the new organisation lay in a capacity to reflect the multicultural nature of France in its own composition. The 1983 March and Convergence 84 were portrayed, somewhat simplistically, as actions which did not extend beyond the Franco-Maghrebian community (referred to in the singular), whereas it was argued that SOS-Racisme had proved successful in also mobilising members of the Jewish and other communities. The association's spokespeople repeatedly



stressed that it was unique in creating 'an intercommunal solidarity (*une solidarité intercommunautaire*)' through its campaigns and in its membership (Désir 1985: 33 and *passim*). (This was a claim which members of the association continued to make during the period of my fieldwork: 'The specificity of the association [i.e. SOS-Racisme] is I think that we are the only anti-racist association which is not community-based or directly dependent on a political party.' [Tape-recorded interview with Hélène, 10 November 1994.]<sup>4</sup>)

Thus, members of SOS-Racisme insisted that multiculturalism was not a political project which they were attempting to realise but rather the reality of contemporary French society. According to Désir (1985: 145), racism could be explained as a refusal to acknowledge the multicultural composition of France by a fraction of the population 'sick with old age and fear (*malade de vieillesse et de peur*)'. He claimed, in contrast, that SOS-Racisme's popularity among young people derived from the fact that the latter accepted 'difference' as an aspect of their everyday lives and social relationships: 'Difference is their universe' (Désir 1985: 145). Underlying this argument was the implication that in giving voice to young people's opposition to racism, SOS-Racisme was also effectively contributing to a 'modernisation' of the society's self-representation by forcing recognition of cultural diversity.

This leads on to the second point which is that SOS-Racisme's spokespeople appeared to equate multiculturalism with a positive evaluation of cultural complexity. Harlem Désir, for example, stated that one of the aims of SOS-Racisme was to highlight the necessity of 'valuing the richness arising from the meeting of cultures (*valoriser la richesse née de la rencontre entre toutes les cultures*)' (1985: 33). The association repeatedly argued that cultural differences contributed to the dynamism and strength of the country and

were to be celebrated rather than rejected (*Témoignage Chrétien*, 12 May 1985; *Libération*, 17 June 1985). In so doing, SOS-Racisme again appeared to adopt one of the objectives of Convergence 84 which had been to challenge the idea of France as a culturally homogeneous nation. There was, however, a certain ambivalence about SOS-Racisme's position on this issue, as is indicated by the following comment by Harlem Désir in the run-up to the Place de la Concorde concert in June 1985:

The show will demonstrate ...that multicultural France is not a utopia. For a start, on the stage there will be artists representing all the cultures with which French young people identify ... It will be a demonstration of the great mixing (*métissage*) which has already taken place. (*Libération*, 13 June 1985)<sup>5</sup>

Although Désir refers here to France as a multicultural society, his subsequent use of the notion of *métissage* implies a very specific understanding of cultural complexity and difference. The argument appears to be that young people identify with a type of hybrid culture, common to them all, but which incorporates elements from a diverse range of sources. This is similar to the interpretation of multiculturalism, referred to earlier, as a form of intercommunal solidarity rather than as the coexistence of relatively discrete 'communities'. What Désir is suggesting in the passage above is that 'French culture' is diverse and heterogeneous but it is nevertheless singular in the sense of being shared by and common to all groups in society.

In the light of this point, the distance between SOS-Racisme's view of multiculturalism and the concept of 'the right to be different' becomes readily apparent. As formulated by the French Socialist Party (PS) from the mid-1970s onwards, the right to be different implied a recognition of the specificity of regional identities and cultures through, for example, proposals

for the teaching of regional languages and a certain level of economic decentralisation (Safran 1984, 1985). The culmination of this movement towards cultural and ethnic pluralism within the PS was the 1982 Giordan Report which held that ethnic, religious and linguistic 'minorities' should not be deprived of the right to practise their own religion and culture, as well as to speak their own language (see Vichniac 1991: 43-44). Now, while SOS-Racisme shared a commitment to supporting cultural diversity, its conception of a hybrid 'French culture' tended to stress shared cultural forms (such as the common, albeit diverse, musical tastes of young people) rather than the existence of a number of separate cultural or ethnic identities. For this reason, I would suggest that it is mistaken to associate SOS-Racisme with 'the praising of the right to be different (*l'éloge du droit à la différence*)' at this time (Perrineau 1997: 50). Instead, SOS-Racisme sought to highlight the participation of young people in a common culture and shared activities, a view which is in fact much closer to a notion of integration than to the right to be different.

For the same reason, I would argue that while SOS-Racisme's minimal definition of multiculturalism is open to serious objections, as I indicate below, it does not involve the ideological contradiction which Taguieff has described as 'the "pluricultural" contradiction (*la contradiction du «pluriculturel»*)' (1993: 359). According to Taguieff, the use of terms such as 'pluricultural' and 'multicultural' by anti-racists has frequently masked a contradiction between two competing positions. The first is represented by the right to be different, understood as an 'unconditional' commitment to respect group identities and to ensure their preservation. The second corresponds more closely to notions of *métissage* and *mélange*, that is, to the fusion or eventual elimination of group differences, informed by the view that difference is the cause of racism. Anti-racist arguments about cultural

difference have, Taguieff argues, frequently asserted these two incompatible positions simultaneously (see Chapter 6).

It should be clear from the material presented above that SOS-Racisme has never adhered to the strict definition of the right to be different which Taguieff proposes. Rather, the association has fairly consistently adopted the second orientation, and linked the notion of multiculturalism to that of a hybrid or syncretic culture. Although SOS-Racisme subsequently abandoned the language of multiculturalism for a concept of integration, it retained a vision of France as a society '*du mélange*' (see Désir and SOS-Racisme 1987: 15). (There is some evidence, nonetheless, of the tension between 'egalitarian' and 'elitist' conceptions of hybridity identified by Taguieff in anti-racist 'discourse' and which I discussed in the last chapter. On the one hand, the association has insisted that hybridity is universal and effectively part of the human condition [Désir and SOS-Racisme 1985]. On the other, however, it is sometimes implied that hybridity [*métissage*] is a mark of cultural or aesthetic superiority [e.g. interview with Harlem Désir in *Témoignage Chrétien*, 12 May 1985].)

Not only did SOS-Racisme's notion of multiculturalism run counter to previous definitions of the right to be different, however, it also departed from the concept of a multicultural society which had been developed by Franco-Maghrebian activists in the early 1980s. According to Bouamama (1994: 102), the organisers of Convergence 84 rejected the idea that the national bond was in any sense cultural or identity-based. They argued that the political unity of the nation did not depend on cultural uniformity but was constituted instead through citizenship. It followed, as a result, that a recognition of cultural diversity did not represent a threat to national unity.<sup>6</sup>

Convergence 84's commitment to multiculturalism was combined, however,

with a demand for equal rights. Multiculturalism without equality was viewed as leading only to a perpetuation of injustice and social segregation. Now, Bouamama argues that it was precisely the link between multiculturalism and equal rights which was broken by SOS-Racisme. He suggests that SOS-Racisme redefined multiculturalism simply as a tolerance for or celebration of cultural diversity without connecting this to the concern for equal rights and a dissociation of citizenship from nationality which had characterised Convergence 84's position. In his view, SOS-Racisme thus contributed to a 'folklorisation' of multiculturalism which reduced it to a preoccupation with different types of food and music. Moreover, Bouamama claims that SOS-Racisme further undermined the radical potential of the concept of multiculturalism by subordinating it to the notion of *métissage*. He proposes that in fact SOS-Racisme's promotion of *métissage* constituted a denial of the multicultural nature of France:

What is refused here is the existence of several cultures constituent of a changing French identity. French identity remains single and monolithic. Ideas of synthesis, mixing and blending logically follow from this. One goes back to the old idea of the 'French melting-pot', in which different cultures are mixed, resulting in a single but hybrid (*métissée*) culture. To the idea of multiculturalism is opposed that of mixture. For the affirmation of a wish for convergence is substituted that of mixture. (Bouamama 1994: 123)<sup>7</sup>

According to Bouamama, this reflected a desire on the part of SOS-Racisme's leadership and their supporters in the PS to defuse the debate on national identity which had emerged with the rise of the National Front (FN) in the early 1980s. In such a context, he suggests, the recognition of a truly multicultural French identity—with notably a North African or Arab component—was perceived as running counter to the current state of a public opinion susceptible to the FN's nationalist rhetoric. In contrast, the notion of *métissage* appeared to reaffirm the integrity and cohesiveness of French

national culture and identity, while still acknowledging its incorporation of different cultures.

One of the most striking (and unacknowledged) features of the divergences among anti-racist and Franco-Maghrebian activists in the 1980s around the notion of *métissage* is the extent to which they mirrored an earlier debate involving French colonialists and peoples in the Creole territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana and La Réunion. As Françoise Vergès has explained, French colonialists and nationalists differed in the 1930s and 1940s in their attitudes to *métissage*. The former supported it as an aspect of assimilation; the latter were opposed to the notion on the grounds of safeguarding 'racial purity'. Creole peoples, however, rejected both of these perspectives. In particular:

African and Caribbean intellectuals ... argued that the assimilationist version of *métissage* occulted the unequal relation between European and non-European cultures. Its aim was nothing more than the extinction of local and native cultural practices. [...] *Métissage* was a term too closely connected with the colonial project to be adopted by the colonized. If *métissage* acknowledged the cultural productions in non-European territories, its use by European assimilationists was aimed at subsuming these productions into European culture. (Vergès 1996: 141)

A similar argument is implicit in Bouamama's critique of the emphasis placed on *métissage* by SOS-Racisme in the mid-1980s. The association's marginalisation of the struggle for equality in favour of a minimal notion of multiculturalism effectively resulted in a concept of hybrid culture which failed to recognise the power relationships structuring the process of *métissage*. As in the case of Creole territories discussed by Vergès, *métissage* in France during the 1980s implied a recognition of cultural diversity, but it also carried potentially assimilationist implications which SOS-Racisme's leadership would undoubtedly have resisted in other contexts.<sup>8</sup> What



remained absent in SOS-Racisme's promotion of the term, in short, was an interrogation of its historical link with European assimilationism and the appropriateness of its continued use in a post-colonial context.

In the event, SOS-Racisme was subsequently to substitute alternative terms for multiculturalism and *métissage*, at least partly in response to the emergence of what Taguieff has described as a 'differentialist racism' (see Taguieff 1995: Ch. IX).<sup>9</sup> The appropriation of the notion of 'difference' by the far right in order to legitimate inequality and racist exclusion led the association to reaffirm publicly its opposition to *le droit à la différence* (e.g. Désir and SOS-Racisme 1987: 36). In particular, Harlem Désir's comments on the current affairs television programme *L'Heure de vérité* in August 1987 were widely interpreted as signalling a transition from a multiculturalist stance to a more 'Republican' concept of integration (*Libération*, 21 August 1987; *Le Monde*, 27 October 1987). It is certainly true that SOS-Racisme's terminology shifted during this period, but to what extent did this reflect an underlying conceptual or ideological change?

## Integration and the Republican Tradition

In order to address this question, it is useful to begin by setting SOS-Racisme's choice of terminology in a wider political context. As Françoise Gaspard (1992) has outlined, the 1980s witnessed a number of important changes in the political and administrative language employed to refer to the incorporation of foreigners and immigrants into French society. Through an analysis of parliamentary debates, ministerial speeches and administrative circulars covering a ten-year period (1981-1991), she traces the shifting usage of the terms *assimilation*, *insertion* and *intégration* by left- and right-wing

politicians during these years. She reveals that at the start of the decade the Left's interventions in debates about immigration tended to be phrased in terms of *insertion*, whereas the Right characteristically employed the word *intégration*.<sup>10</sup> By the time of its return to power in 1988, however, the Left had abandoned 'insertion' and 'integration' became 'so to speak the official term for referring to settled immigrant populations (*en quelque sorte le terme officiel pour parler de l'immigration sédentarisée*)' (Gaspard 1992: 19). After a brief period (1986-88) during which the Right increasingly referred to insertion, it also ended the decade using 'integration' instead.

These brief comments on debates about *intégration* among politicians in France during the 1980s and early 1990s help to contextualise SOS-Racisme's adoption of the concept in two ways. Firstly, they indicate that the association's shift away from the term *multiculturalisme* in favour of *intégration* formed part of a wider movement on the political Left towards the latter notion. Secondly, they raise the possibility that the priority attached by SOS-Racisme to integration from 1987 onwards reflected, in Lorcerie's terms, an initial 'assertion of national identity (*prise d'identité nationale*)' by the Republican left which was subsequently theorised by social scientists. In the remainder of this section, I intend to explore the concept of integration articulated by SOS-Racisme, providing an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and considering the extent to which it differed from the association's previous interpretation of multiculturalism.

As I have already mentioned, SOS-Racisme's move towards a concept of integration in 1986-7 was partly prompted by a recognition that the language of 'difference' had been appropriated by the extreme right. In response, the association sought to distance itself from the 'ambiguity' of 'the right to be different' by emphasising the importance of equal rights and *intégration*

(Désir/SOS-Racisme 1987: 36). The first major public statement of SOS-Racisme's position on and definition of integration was Harlem Désir's appearance on *L'Heure de vérité*, which was quickly followed by a book-length discussion (Désir and SOS-Racisme 1987). Over the next four years, the association gradually developed a set of detailed proposals for a specific integration policy and called for the creation of a new government Ministry for Integration (see SOS-Racisme 1990; Désir 1991).

The term *intégration* had been used by SOS-Racisme's leadership before 1987, but its subsequent definition departed from earlier meanings. At the time of the 1985 Concorde concert, the association's vice-president Julien Dray had, for example, referred to 'the conditions of integration of the Beur community (*les conditions d'intégration de la communauté beur*)' (*Le Quotidien de Paris*, 15-16 June 1985). In a similar way, Harlem Désir later spoke of the integration of 'communities' into French society (*Le Matin*, 30-31 August 1986). The concept of integration which SOS-Racisme articulated after 1987, however, defined it unambiguously as an individual process. During his appearance before the Nationality Commission created by Jacques Chirac in 1987, Harlem Désir provided a concise statement of the association's view of integration at the time:

The Republic is precisely the possibility for men and women of different origins and cultures to live according to common values, to adhere to shared principles of law and to be subject to the same obligations with, in exchange, the same rights. This is our conception of integration. (Harlem Désir, in Commission de la nationalité 1988: 558-9)<sup>11</sup>

On the basis of this definition, it is possible to identify the different constituent parts of SOS-Racisme's conceptualisation of integration. In the first place, integration is presented as a commitment to a set of 'universal' and Republican values. Secondly, the process of integration involves

individuals rather than 'communities' or groups. Thirdly, integration presupposes a common legal framework and that individuals enjoy equal rights and obligations. A fourth aspect can be added to the aforementioned, which is the notion of reciprocity, 'one step on the part of immigrant populations towards French society and one step by French society towards immigrant populations (*un pas de l'immigration vers la société française et un pas de la société vers l'immigration*)' (Malik Boutih [then Vice-President of SOS-Racisme], quoted in *L'Humanité*, 3 May 1990.).<sup>12</sup> An example of this last point is Harlem Désir's proposal to the Nationality Commission that the nation should grant French nationality at birth to all children of foreigners (Commission de la nationalité 1988: 550).

The promotion of the 'integration' of immigrants and their descendants continued to be one of the association's primary objectives during the period of my fieldwork (see Chapter 10). An activist in the local committee of which I was a member provided the following commentary on the notion:

For me it is a concept which is a French concept and one which existed beyond SOS-Racisme, or, at least, before SOS-Racisme, well before. (Except that it is SOS-Racisme which has perhaps named and popularised it.) And which is that in this country people could arrive in waves of immigration with their differences, with their cultures, and French society absorbed them along with something else. That is, French society plus those people was not equivalent to French society as it was before; it produced a new French society [...] a new component was created. But it wasn't a question of different communities living side by side each other. It was the case that you were French, you weren't Algerian in France or Italian or Polish. You didn't go to a Polish school or an Italian school; you went to a French school. The Republican school. [...] I've always been very proud of that model, which is different to the Anglo-Saxon model, with which it is often contrasted, which is a so-called community-based model. (Tape-recorded interview with Laurence, 7 December 1994)<sup>13</sup>

The 'French' concept of individual integration is contrasted here with a supposedly 'Anglo-Saxon' multicultural approach in terms of discrete ethnic

communities. Laurence also emphasises the difference between integration and assimilation, presenting the former as a more reciprocal process in which the host society is itself transformed.

While the reciprocal nature of the integration process has been consistently highlighted by SOS-Racisme's spokespeople as a positive feature, the association's use of *intégration* is problematic, and for several reasons. It is interesting to note in this connection that the weaknesses linked to it are the same as those which Lorcerie has detected in intellectual debates about integration in the early 1990s. This provides further confirmation of her assertion that social scientists involved in this area have abandoned the integration concept developed within the classical sociological tradition and uncritically adopted many of the term's meanings in political debate or common usage more generally (see Lorcerie 1994: 251).

In my view, there are three main objections which can be levelled against SOS-Racisme's use of *intégration* in its public statements and policy proposals. I will simply highlight these here and provide a few examples.<sup>14</sup> Firstly, the association defines integration in terms of 'common values (*valeurs communes*)', 'universal values (*valeurs universelles*)', 'republican values (*valeurs républicaines*)', but these are generally not specified. In the passage quoted above from his appearance before the Nationality Commission, for example, Harlem Désir leaves implicit the precise meaning of the phrase 'common values (*valeurs communes*)'. In a similar way, a precise and detailed definition of 'republican values' is rarely provided in much recent sociological work on the nation (see Lorcerie 1994: 258). Secondly, an examination of SOS-Racisme's public pronouncements reveals a certain vagueness in the identification of those concerned by the integration process. Thus, the association varies between calling for the integration of

'immigrants (*les immigrés*)' and of 'foreigners (*les étrangers*)', or more recently, 'the excluded (*les exclus*)' (see *L'Express*, 2-8 October 1987; *Le Nouvel Observateur* 14-20 December 1989; *L'Humanité*, 12 July 1993). The first two terms are not, of course, synonymous and their conflation masks the complexity of the populations thereby designated with respect to their administrative status (see Gaspard 1992: 21; Cordeiro 1992).

A third, and more general, problem with the integration concept is, as the sociologist Robert Miles has argued, its 'ideological character and role' (Miles 1993: 176). In a penetrating analysis of government reports and policies on 'integration' in The Netherlands, he shows that the notion serves to 'mystify' social relations and to 'problematise' the presence of immigrants in the nation-state:

The notion of integration refers generally to a process of mixing or amalgamation of a previously external population with another, pre-existing population in a nation state. The process is defined a priori as problematic, if not conflictual. The assumption is that the former population is not yet a participant, or not yet an equal participant, in social relations. Herein lies the origin of the problematic status of the concept. For, in suggesting that immigrant populations, or rather populations of recent immigrant origin, resident in the nation states of western Europe should *now* be integrated into the nation state by means of state intervention, it is denied that they have been, from the very instant of their arrival in western Europe, an integral part of these social formations. [...] The notion of integration therefore *exteriorises* in thought, and in politics, those populations which are already, indeed have always been, a constituent element of the social formation. (Miles 1993: 175, emphases in original)

The effect of this, according to Miles, is to turn attention away from issues of racism, inequality and discrimination, and to transform the presence of immigrants and their descendants into a 'problem' which needs to be addressed through state action.

The critique of the integration concept which Miles provides (and which I



have only partially outlined here) raises serious questions about the appropriateness of SOS-Racisme's decision to frame its general approach and specific policy proposals in terms of the notion. I would argue in fact, *pace* Taguieff, that the association's emphasis on 'integration' since the 1980s has been one of the most problematic aspects of its action. This is a point which I attempt to illustrate in Chapter 10, where I discuss the association's positions in the 1989 and 1994 'Islamic headscarf' affairs.

## Conclusion

From around 1987, SOS-Racisme's adoption and active promotion of a view of integration led many commentators to claim that the association had renounced a former commitment to a 'multicultural' or 'pluricultural' vision of France in favour of a more 'traditional' Republican conception of the nation and its incorporation of foreigners. This assertion was vehemently denied on repeated occasions by the leadership who argued that they had always called for 'a policy of social and cultural integration of immigrants (*une politique d'intégration sociale et culturelle des immigrés*)' (see, for example, interviews with Désir in *L'Express*, 2-8 October 1987 and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14-20 December 1989 as well as Désir 1990: 47). To a large extent, the material discussed in this chapter lends support to such a statement. As I have indicated, SOS-Racisme's version of multiculturalism was opposed to a vision of France as an assemblage of different communities, and stressed instead the common cultural forms shared by individual young people of diverse origins. The association was also formally committed from the outset to equal rights (including the vote at local elections for resident foreigners), although it accorded less priority to this issue than had those involved in the 1983 March and Convergence 84.

On the basis of the material discussed in this chapter I would argue, in fact, that SOS-Racisme's terminological shifts - from the language of *multiculturalisme* to that of *intégration* - mask a fundamental continuity of the 'style' in which it has 'imagined' (Anderson 1983: 15) the nation and the place of foreigners and immigrants within it. As I have indicated, the association's version of multiculturalism was explicitly opposed to the formation of ethnic communities and ethnically-based forms of political mobilisation, and was in this sense entirely consistent with an emergent conception of 'the Republican tradition' of integration. The association's subsequent adoption of the concept of integration did not reflect a radical change of perspective, therefore, but rather a consolidation and elaboration of its earlier position. I have argued, however, that SOS-Racisme's use of the integration concept is open to a number of serious criticisms and threatens to blunt the effectiveness of its action against racism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is nonetheless true, as David McCrone has noted, that Anderson's discussion of 'the institutional mechanisms which sustain and shape the belief in a people's distinctiveness' is under-developed (McCrone 1998: 6).

<sup>2</sup> 'L'identité nationale est le résultat (émergent) des innombrables accomplissements quotidiens de la population nationale. Ces accomplissements constituent globalement le procès d'identisation de la population nationale. Parmi ces accomplissements, certains sont des conduites symboliques intentionnelles visant l'identité du «nous» national: ils constituent des prises d'identité nationale.'

<sup>3</sup> '...notre démarche première a été une envie de partir de ce que chacun de nous vivait autour de lui pour démontrer que l'assimilation est possible, que la multiracialité est vécue parfois positivement. Que c'est bien de vivre avec des étrangers, que ça fait voyager sur place et que c'est une richesse sociale. [...] La société multicolore, ils [les lycéens] la vivent ici et maintenant.'

<sup>4</sup> 'La spécificité de l'association, je pense que c'est que l'on est la seule association antiraciste à ne pas être communautaire ou [dépendant] directement d'un parti politique.'

<sup>5</sup> 'La fête fera la démonstration ... que la France multi-culturelle n'est pas une utopie. D'abord sur le plateau: il y aura des artistes représentatifs de toutes les cultures auxquelles s'identifie la jeunesse française ...Ce sera une démonstration du grand métissage qui s'est déjà opéré.'

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this point see Bouamama (1992: 190-195).

<sup>7</sup> 'Ce qui est refusé ici, c'est l'existence de plusieurs cultures constitutives d'une identité française en mutation. L'identité française reste unique et monolithique. Il en découle logiquement les idées de synthèse, de métissage et de mélange. Pour ce faire, l'on reprend la vieille idée du «creuset français» dans lequel se mélangent des cultures différentes, pour déboucher sur une culture unique mais métissée. A l'idée multiculturelle est opposée celle du mélange. A l'affirmation d'une volonté de convergence est substituée celle du mélange.'

<sup>8</sup> See also Amselle's (1996) critique of 'le racisme du métissage'.

<sup>9</sup> It is perhaps worth noting in this connection that in 1985 Harlem Désir was fully aware of the potential (and historical) use of 'difference' to underpin racism (Désir 1985: 142).

<sup>10</sup> In the light of this point, the incumbent president of SOS-Racisme's recent comment that 'Avant SOS, on ne parlait pas d'intégration.' (Sylla 1996a: 158) must be viewed with some scepticism.

<sup>11</sup> 'La République, c'est justement la possibilité pour les hommes et les femmes d'origine différente, de culture différente, de vivre selon des valeurs communes, d'adhérer à des principes de loi communs et d'être soumis aux mêmes devoirs avec, en contrepartie, les mêmes droits. Voilà notre conception de l'intégration.'

<sup>12</sup> This is an idea also found in academic discussions of integration (see Weil and Crowley 1994; Costa-Lascoux 1991: 9).

<sup>13</sup> 'C'était pour moi un concept qui est un concept français et qui existait au-delà de SOS-Racisme, fin avant SOS-Racisme, bien avant. Sauf que c'est SOS qui l'a peut-être nommé et vulgarisé. Et qui était que dans ce pays les gens pouvaient arriver par vagues d'immigration avec leurs différences, avec leurs cultures et que la société française les absorbait avec autre chose. C'est à dire la société française plus ces gens-là ça faisait pas la société française comme elle était avant, mais ça faisait une nouvelle société française. [...] Et c'était pas des communautés qui vivaient des unes à côté des autres. C'était, on était français, on n'était pas algérien en France ou italien ou polonais. On allait pas dans une école polonaise, dans une école italienne, on allait dans une école française. Républicaine. [...] Donc moi j'ai toujours été très fière de ce modèle là qui était un modèle différent du modèle anglo-saxon à qui on l'oppose souvent et qui était un modèle commun...dit communautaire.'

<sup>14</sup> See Silverman (1992: 139) for a further discussion of this topic. An issue which is rarely discussed in the debate on intégration is its former meaning in the colonial context and the extent to which it has incorporated previous notions such as assimilation or adaptation. Sayad (1994: 9) argues that this 'sédimentation de sens' is one of the term's distinctive features.

## Part III : Practice

## Chapter 8

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### Leadership, political opportunities, and organisational identity

The 1993 legislative elections in France altered the political opportunity structure for social movements by bringing about a significant change in the configuration of power on the Left. Specifically, an opportunity arose for the president of the anti-racist organisation SOS-Racisme (among others) to participate in the formal political process through an invitation from a centre-left party to stand as a candidate on its list for the 1994 European elections. This proposal was debated by SOS-Racisme's National Council at a special meeting held in Paris in April 1994. In the following chapter, I examine the action taken by SOS-Racisme's president before and during the meeting, discussing it in terms of Melucci's recent analysis (1996) of the role of leadership in social movements. My argument, in brief, is that the exchanges which took place revealed important differences between the leadership and grassroots activists, both in the assessment of political opportunities and in the definition of the nature and identity of the organisation itself.<sup>1</sup>



Although the issue of leadership in the contemporary French anti-racist movement has preoccupied activists for many years, it has attracted surprisingly little academic attention. Studies of political leadership in France since the 1960s have tended instead to focus on contrasting styles of presidential leadership.<sup>2</sup> In the last decade, however, interesting work on the 'leadership strategies' of Maghrebian elites in France has started to be published (Geisser 1997). Nevertheless, there has been relatively little detailed research on the question of leadership within the broader anti-racist movement of the past twenty years (notable exceptions are Bouamama 1994 and Abdallah 2000).

The following chapter addresses this gap in the literature by examining aspects of the leadership role within SOS-Racisme in the mid-1990s. Two general ideas guide my discussion. The first is that the study of leadership involves an examination of two types of relationship: on the one hand, that between 'leaders' and 'followers' (Edinger 1967: 15); and, on the other, that between 'human agency' – the purposive activity of leaders and their followers, and 'political structure' – the opportunities and constraints which shape such action (Cole 1997: 166). The second assumption is that analysis of political opportunity structures must take into account not only 'objective' factors, such as the nature of the electoral system, but also the ways in which different actors *perceive* the political opportunities available to them (Tarrow 1988: 430). Leaders and grassroots members of social movement organisations, for example, do not always share the same perception of the potential costs and benefits of a particular course of action. As in the case considered here, fundamental differences in the evaluation of political opportunities can threaten to undermine organisational unity and the legitimacy of a leader's position.

## Changing political opportunities for anti-racism in France

The concept of 'political opportunity structure' has proved a useful tool for analysing the influence of political and institutional factors on the emergence and development of social movements. It is associated in particular with the political process perspective of theorists such as Kitschelt (1986), Tarrow (1988, 1994), and Kriesi (1995, 1996). In slightly different ways, each of these scholars has conceptualised the political opportunity structure for social movements in terms of a specific set of properties or dimensions of the political context. This thesis follows Kriesi in regarding the formal institutional structure of the state, the dominant procedures and strategies employed by authorities in the face of external demands, and the configuration of political power as the three key features of the political opportunity structure (see Chapter 3).

In recent years, the concept of political opportunity structure has been used by a number of scholars to explain why social movements had such a limited impact in France compared to other Western democracies during the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Kriesi and his colleagues have suggested, for example, that the formal institutional structure of the French political system negatively affects social movements' chances of success. Kriesi refers to France as a 'strong' or 'closed' state in that it is characterised by a high degree of centralisation, the dominance of the executive over the legislature and the judiciary, the cohesion and professionalisation of its system of public administration, and the infrequent use of 'direct democracy procedures' such as referenda. The French state, in other words, offers few 'points of access' to social movements (unlike in more decentralised systems) and is able to act to a large extent independently of their influence (see Kriesi 1995: 171-2).<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Kriesi has claimed that the dominant strategy of the French authorities with respect to groups challenging the system, such as social movements, is one of 'total exclusion' (Kriesi 1995: 174-7). As Duyvendak (1994: 102-4) has also noted, the strength of the state in France allows the authorities either simply to 'ignore' social movements or to repress challengers believed to constitute a serious threat to the system. However, Duyvendak insists that the exclusion of social movements from the political system by ruling elites is 'selective' rather than total. He points out that the French state can, and does, actively encourage and promote some social movements if their objectives are regarded as coinciding with those of the authorities (Duyvendak 1994: 105), although I would maintain that this applies more to specific SMOs than to whole movements (see Chapter 3). (Kriesi has subsequently revised his view in line with Duyvendak's more nuanced position [see Kriesi 1996: 160].)

Finally, Kriesi and his colleagues have highlighted the nature of the electoral system and the balance of power both within and between political parties as a key factor influencing the success or failure of social movements in France. The second-ballot system used in French parliamentary elections specifies that in the absence of an absolute majority in the first ballot, only candidates securing 12.5% of the votes of registered electors can go forward to contest the second round. In line with many French political scientists, Duyvendak argues that this tends to produce a left-right bipolarisation which excludes candidates from smaller parties, such as the Greens, representing the demands of social movements (Duyvendak 1994: 120; Kriesi 1995: 180). Duyvendak also points specifically to the configuration of power on the Left as an important factor in determining the success or failure of social movements in France. He suggests that the struggle between the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCF) for Left hegemony in the 1960s

and 1970s resulted in the marginalisation of 'new' social movements in favour of a more 'traditional' class politics. Socialist Party support for social movements during this period was of a limited and instrumental nature, and effectively ended with the party's victory at the 1981 legislative and presidential elections (Duyvendak 1994: 119-144; Kriesi 1995: 180-6. See also Diani 1991; Ladrech 1989; Lewis and Sferza 1987).

This general account of the political opportunity structure for social movements in France during the 1980s helps to clarify the nature of the change which led ultimately to the events discussed in the present chapter. The key point is that the 1993 legislative elections in France transformed the third aspect of the political opportunity structure highlighted by Kriesi and his colleagues – the distribution of power amongst political parties, particularly those on the Left – with important consequences for SOS-Racisme and other social movement organisations. Five years previously, in May 1988, François Mitterrand had been re-elected as President of the Republic. This was followed a month later by a Socialist victory at the legislative elections, although 13 seats short of an overall majority. Over the next few years, however, the Socialist Government's popularity declined dramatically as a result of a series of scandals, public displays of internal party rivalry and a widely-perceived failure to tackle rising unemployment (Machin 1993: 599). This culminated in a crushing defeat for the Socialists at the March 1993 legislative elections. The Socialist vote was halved (to 17.62% of votes cast), with the party's parliamentary representation reduced from 276 to only 70 deputies. The electoral system ensured that with 44% of the vote, the centre-right RPR-UDF coalition took 80% of the seats (Hanley 1993).

The Socialists' disastrous results at the 1993 elections added fuel to the debate about the future of the party and its links with other progressive

forces which former Prime Minister Michel Rocard had launched in the run-up to the poll (Hanley 1993: 420). Arguments about 'the reconstruction of the left' continued throughout the campaign for the 1994 European elections. A significant development, in this regard, was the decision by a centre-left party, the Movement of Left Radicals (MRG), to present its own list of candidates for the European elections rather than ally itself with the Socialists as it had done on previous occasions. The MRG list, entitled 'Radical Energy (*Énergie radicale*)', was headed by Bernard Tapie, the popular, if somewhat controversial, businessman and president (at the time) of the football team L'Olympique de Marseille (OM). Tapie had entered politics in 1988, when he was elected as a deputy in the Bouches-du-Rhône *département* (comprising the area around Marseilles). He subsequently held a ministerial post, albeit briefly, in the 1992 Socialist Government, prior to joining the MRG in the spring of 1993 (see Bouchet 1992, 1994). Shortly before campaigning for the European elections opened, Tapie was placed under investigation on charges of corruption, and although these eventually led to his imprisonment (*Libération*, 5 February 1997), nothing officially prevented him from standing for the European Parliament in 1994.

The announcement that Tapie would head a separate MRG list for the European elections provoked intense political argument in France. There was widespread speculation that the President of the Republic, François Mitterrand, was acting behind the scenes to promote Tapie, as a way of 'torpedo-ing' the presidential ambitions of Michel Rocard, his long-term rival within the Socialist Party (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 28 April-4 May 1994; *Libération*, 29 April 1994). The MRG stated publicly that its aim was 'to facilitate the emergence of a "reformist pole", independent of the Socialist Party, before the 1995 presidential election' (*Le Monde*, 3 May 1994).<sup>5</sup> In line with this, Tapie actively sought to win over prominent left-wing figures to

the MRG, inviting them to stand as candidates on its list for the European elections. Among those who accepted were a former Socialist minister, an Ecologist, a leading feminist and a trade unionist (Buffotot and Hanley 1995: 3).

One key figure whom Tapie was, however, unable to rally to the 'Radical Energy' list was Fodé Sylla, the then president of SOS-Racisme. Sylla subsequently confirmed that Tapie approached him on 11 April 1994 with the offer of a place on the MRG's list of candidates for the June elections (*L'Événement du jeudi*, 12-18 May 1994). The association's executive committee or National Bureau discussed Tapie's proposal at a meeting in Paris on 27 April 1994; its members were reported as being generally favourable to the idea (*Le Monde*, 29 April 1994). A meeting of SOS-Racisme's National Council was then called. This comprises representatives from the association's committees all over France and is its ultimate decision-making body.

On the 29 April 1994, members of the National Council duly assembled in an amphitheatre at the University of Jussieu in central Paris to consider whether Sylla should accept Tapie's invitation. It quickly became apparent that an important section of the membership was extremely hostile to the proposal. Indeed, even before the meeting took place, the association's Parisian headquarters had received telephone calls from provincial activists, voicing their opposition to Tapie's offer and, in some cases, threatening to leave SOS-Racisme altogether were it to be accepted. The National Council debate provided further evidence of significant divisions within the association. In particular, it highlighted major differences between part of the leadership (*direction*) of SOS-Racisme and many grassroots activists in relation to the perception of political opportunities, the definition of organisational identity,



and the conception of the nature of the leadership role in a social movement organisation.<sup>6</sup>

### Tensions and contradictions in leadership action

Thus far, I have described how moves to reconfigure the French left in the wake of the 1993 legislative elections created an opportunity for members of certain progressive movements, including the president of the social movement organisation SOS-Racisme, to participate in the formal political process. In Kriesi's terms, changes in the political opportunity structure temporarily made the French state less 'closed' to social movements by increasing, albeit partially, formal access to the party system. It is interesting to note here that a similar series of events occurred during the campaign for the 1989 European elections. On that occasion, the incumbent president of SOS-Racisme, Harlem Désir, was offered the fifth place on the Green Party's list of candidates. This was rejected by Désir on the grounds that he intended to constitute his own 'autonomous' slate for the elections (*Le Monde*, 31 March 1989).

Although the idea of a separate list was later abandoned, it reflected the leadership of SOS-Racisme's growing sense of frustration with the apparent imperviousness of the French public administration and party systems to external pressure from social movements. Angered in particular by the failure of the Socialist Party, with which the association has always had close links, to act on its recommendations concerning immigration and *intégration* policies, Désir asked in 1990: 'Is the creation of a political party the only means we have left of making our voice heard?' (*Politis*, 26 April 1990).<sup>7</sup> The launch of a new political organisation did indeed subsequently appear to

Désir and other members of SOS-Racisme's leadership as the most effective way to overcome the state's perceived unresponsiveness to the association's actions (*Le Monde*, 17 June 1992).

The proposed constitution of an independent list for the 1989 European elections and the creation of a new political movement in 1992 can both be interpreted as attempts by SOS-Racisme's leadership to maximise the association's 'means for action' (Melucci 1996: 339). This, as Melucci has explained, is a key aspect of the leadership role in social movements (see below). Confronted with a situation in which SOS-Racisme's capacity, as an association, to influence the political process appeared extremely restricted, its leadership engaged in a search for additional ways of accessing and having an impact upon the political system. The favourable reaction of many members of SOS-Racisme's National Bureau to Tapie's offer of a place on his list of candidates for the 1994 European elections also reflected this preoccupation.

Here I shall draw on Melucci's recent work on leadership in social movements (1996). Although he does not clearly distinguish between leadership of 'movements', 'groups' and 'organisations' (see Melucci 1996: 339-340), his analysis does provide a useful framework for the events I am considering. In the following section, I focus specifically on the competing tasks which leaders of social movement organisations like SOS-Racisme inevitably face and how their own legitimacy can be called into question, depending on how they make a decision or respond to particular needs on the part of the membership.

According to Melucci, the leaders of social movements typically perform five main tasks. Firstly, they define the movement's objectives; these can be of two kinds, either general (ultimate or long-term goals) or specific (more

immediate aims or means to the general ones). In Melucci's view, leaders play an important role in adapting such objectives to take account of changes not only within the movement itself but also in the wider society. A second component of the leadership function is providing 'the means for action'. For the movement to achieve its objectives, leaders must channel members' talents and energies effectively, as well as secure additional resources through contact with, for example, the state and political parties. Thirdly, leaders are faced with the task of maintaining the movement's structure and cohesion. This involves regulating tensions within the movement as well as responding to adversaries' attempts to undermine or destabilise it. As Melucci emphasises, a crucial factor here is a leader's ability to control the circulation of information and to manage the effect of external 'stimuli' (e.g. pressure from other organisations or political opponents) on the movement. A fourth key leadership role is that of mobilising members' support for the movement's objectives. Leaders must act in such a way as to ensure members' continued investment in the movement and agreement about its aims. Finally, Melucci suggests that leaders have an 'expressive' function which is central to the process of collective identity construction. They present members with an image of the movement's identity which can form the basis of solidarity, identification and 'affective gratification' (see Melucci 1996: 339-340).

As Melucci emphasises, these different aspects of the leadership role become 'intertwined' in the daily life of a social movement. In so doing, they may pull leaders in opposite directions by making contradictory or irreconcilable demands. It follows that 'the fulcrum for leadership action is the *decision*, that is, the capacity to choose between alternatives and reduce uncertainties' (1996: 340, emphasis in original). Leaders must, in other words, be able

accurately to weigh up the potential costs and benefits of particular courses of action, taking into account the needs and priorities of members.

This is precisely what was at stake in the meeting of SOS-Racisme's National Council in April 1994. The president of SOS-Racisme, Fodé Sylla, was confronted with a potentially explosive situation which forced him to choose between several competing options and leadership tasks. In the event, he decided to privilege the organisation's unity and cohesion over an opportunity to access new means and resources for action. He did so after failing to mobilise an adequate support base among the membership in favour of a specific, short-term goal (going forward as a candidate on Tapie's list for the 1994 European elections). To rebuild unity, he closed the meeting by explicitly voicing his agreement with an image of the association's identity presented by a previous speaker who had led opposition to the proposed action.

The National Council meeting began with a short opening address by Sylla. As a form of leadership action it exemplified the first task described by Melucci, that of articulating a movement's objectives. In his remarks, Sylla attempted to define both the specific aim of the meeting itself and the wider goals of the organisation. With respect to the first of these, he stated several times that the meeting had been called with a view to debating Tapie's proposition in the 'democratic structures of the association' in order to arrive at a 'collective decision'. He asserted that Tapie's proposition had raised the question of the association's 'autonomy' and 'independence', and this needed to be discussed. However, what became increasingly clear in the course of his intervention was that he personally was not in favour of accepting the offer. Moreover, the impression he gave was that it had already been rejected. This was highlighted by his statement that the National Council

meeting should discuss in general terms, rather than in relation to Tapie's specific offer, how propositions of this sort should be dealt with in the future.<sup>8</sup>

In a way, Sylla's opening statement removed the rationale for the meeting. It reflected two days of telephone calls and debate between the provincial committees and the National Bureau in Paris, during which it had become clear to the leadership (*direction*) that Tapie's offer threatened to split the association down the middle. As Sylla himself stated, he would only accept Tapie's invitation if he had the whole association behind him,<sup>9</sup> and this was manifestly not the case. Nevertheless, the way in which he redefined the objective of the meeting from the specific to the general left some grassroots members perplexed: 'Are we here to discuss the future presence of the president of SOS-Racisme on the European lists or not?' asked one member immediately after Sylla's opening address.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, although Sylla's admission that he was in favour of rejecting the offer can be viewed as an attempt to reassure members deeply opposed to it, and head-off a major confrontation, the redefinition of the purpose of the meeting only increased some activists' dissatisfaction with the leadership. When I interviewed François (a Paris-based activist) some months after the meeting, for example, he declared:

What was a bit scandalous was the fact that ... there was no consultation [...]. So, in fact, the decision which was due to be taken – supposedly all together – was a sham because Fodé Sylla knew even before the meeting that he wouldn't belong to [Tapie's] list. [There was] no democratic debate. Really, it was done ... It was a struggle for power, a struggle of the apparatchiks between themselves, but without the grassroots activists being adequately informed about the situation. (Tape-recorded interview, 2 October 1994)<sup>11</sup>

Here members of the National Bureau are dismissively referred to as 'the apparatchiks' and are presented as primarily concerned with their own

internal power struggles to the detriment of the interests of the rank and file. According to this activist, everything had already been decided behind closed doors, before the meeting had even taken place. He went on to claim that Michel Rocard had put pressure on Julien Dray, one of the founders of SOS-Racisme and a Socialist deputy since 1988, to persuade Sylla not to stand as a candidate on Tapie's list. This sense of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring was shared by another member I interviewed who commented that 'you had the impression that there had been a discussion at a higher level, pressure from above ...'<sup>12</sup> (Various rumours to this effect were, in fact, circulating in the press at the time. For his part, Dray admitted only that he had advised Sylla against accepting the offer [*Le Monde*, 29 April 1994], while the latter strenuously denied that prominent figures in the Socialist Party had 'intervened' [*L'Événement du jeudi*, 12-18 May 1994].)

Leaving aside the question of the influence exerted by Socialist Party in this matter, it is clear that Tapie's proposition was initially attractive to Sylla and other members of SOS-Racisme's National Bureau for reasons related to a second aspect of the leadership role: the mobilisation of resources enabling a movement to realise its objectives. In Melucci's words, a leader 'must procure the maximum amount of resources available in the environment by entering into relations with other groups and organizations and with the society at large' (1996: 339). Both in Sylla's initial address and in the interventions of a number of National Bureau members during the meeting, emphasis was laid on the resources which acceptance of the offer would make available to the organisation. A succession of National Bureau members, for example, repeated that Sylla's election to the European Parliament would give SOS-Racisme a 'platform' from which to promote anti-racism at a European level and lead the struggle against the far right. One member of the National Bureau added that the association was currently experiencing difficulty in



getting its ideas taken up, and that its mobilisations lacked credibility; this implied that new means for action were needed in order to ensure the organisation's long-term survival and effectiveness. It was pointed out that more mundane resources would be forthcoming as well, such as information but also the salary associated with the post, a not negligible consideration given that the association's state subsidy had recently been reduced (after the return of the Right to power in March 1993).

While the leadership's initial attraction to Tapie's offer can be viewed as a way of maximising the SOS-Racisme's means for action, entering into any sort of agreement with Tapie was bound to be controversial, given the nature of the individual involved (as I have already noted, numerous allegations of corruption surrounded his business dealings). For opponents of the offer, in fact, the nature of this attempt to maximise resources smacked of opportunism and 'scheming'. The leadership opened itself up, in particular, to the accusation that it was putting political expediency before genuine anti-racist politics. This was one of the main arguments advanced in an article on the meeting published in the weekly paper of the Trotskyist organisation the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), some of whose members were then actively involved in SOS-Racisme. The article criticised:

all the past and present digressions aimed at subordinating the anti-racist struggle to extraneous concerns, ones which correspond more closely to self-seeking machinations, chicanery even, than to a desire to advance the construction of a collective framework capable of exerting an influence in favour of equal rights. (*Rouge*, 5 May 1994)<sup>13</sup>

In a similar way, Alain (a grassroots activist based in the Paris region) stated to me in an interview:

Well, what struck me the most about this episode was the lack of political awareness of a certain number of my comrades, notably in the National Bureau. It makes them prepared to form all sorts of

alliances and ends up as a certain opportunism. As in when they say: 'Yes, but Tapie, he is popular in the suburbs (*banlieues*).' Yes, but well, just because a number of people are taken in it doesn't mean that the association should follow suit. (Tape-recorded interview, 22 November 1994)<sup>14</sup>

What the incident revealed, for this activist, was the political naiveté of a section of the leadership. As I have already indicated, Sylla had stated in his opening address to the National Council meeting that he personally was against accepting Tapie's offer. Nevertheless, during the remainder of the meeting a series of National Bureau members intervened to argue in favour of a more positive response. They did so by highlighting Tapie's popularity among the type of young urban people the association itself was attempting to attract. For the activist quoted above this was not a sufficient reason for the SOS-Racisme to become involved with Tapie, and instead reflected an opportunistic approach rather than a principled political position.

Viewed from Sylla's perspective, however, the central question was the contradiction or at the very least the tension which existed between two of his tasks as president of SOS-Racisme. The first was that of maximising the organisation's resources with a view to increasing the effectiveness of its action and ability to realise its objectives. The second was the need to maintain the organisation's structure, cohesion and unity. As his opening address made clear, Sylla had decided that to seek to maximise resources through accepting Tapie's offer would be to risk provoking a split in the organisation. In particular, it appeared likely to prompt the departure of those associated with the Revolutionary Communist League as well as other members not directly affiliated to any political party. There was, in short, a balance to be struck between two key components of the leadership role.

In coming to a decision, Sylla had to assess the membership's reaction and the strength of opposition to the proposition. A key aspect of the leadership's attempt to maintain the cohesion of the organisation in the meantime was control over the circulation of information. A reminder of the time-scale involved illustrates this point. As Sylla later confirmed in an interview, Tapie had made the offer on 11 April (*L'Événement du jeudi*, 12-18 May 1994). It was not, however, debated by the National Bureau until the 27 April, and it was only then that the decision was taken to call a meeting of the National Council two days later. In so doing, the leadership was obviously attempting to 'manage' and contain the potential effect of Tapie's invitation on the membership at large. Nevertheless, grassroots activists were subsequently to regard the leadership's failure to inform the membership sooner and to give adequate notice of the National Council meeting as evidence of a lack of transparency and internal democracy. The Paris-based activist François (whose description of National Bureau members as 'apparatchiks' I quoted earlier), for example, expressed his dissatisfaction as follows:

For a start, what was serious about this episode was that ... the National Council meeting which took place, people were informed about it the day before. That is to say that three quarters of the activists from outside Paris, including those from Toulouse who were among those who had strongly expressed their opposition to the project, had enormous difficulty in coming to Paris ... to participate in this decision. I personally was informed the day before by telephone. (Tape-recorded interview, 2 October 1994)<sup>15</sup>

The issue raised here is the extent to which the late announcement of the National Council meeting prevented representatives of SOS-Racisme's provincial committees, as well as grassroots activists from the Paris region, from attending. Thus, while the leadership's control over channels of communication may have successfully limited controversy over Tapie's invitation to the two-day period leading up to the meeting, it only served in

the longer term to increase dissatisfaction with the National Bureau on the part of sections of the membership. It was even claimed that the leadership only resolved to consult the rank and file when reports of negotiations between Tapie and Sylla were published in the press (*Rouge*, 5 May 1994).

So far I have only discussed the first three components of the leadership role described by Melucci: defining objectives, mobilising resources and maintaining structure and cohesion. Now I want briefly to consider examples of the remaining two leadership tasks: mobilising a support base and reinforcing identity. With respect to the first of these, the National Council meeting can be interpreted as an attempt by the leadership to persuade grassroots members that the potential benefits which would flow from accepting Tapie's offer outweighed any costs. A common theme running through the interventions by National Bureau members in the course of the evening was that the association was in the process of 'missing an opportunity', that it risked 'missing the boat'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, members were encouraged to accept that the association had to adapt to a changing environment and take advantage of an opening that was presenting itself. In this way, the leadership sought to secure members' identification with the short-term aim of fielding a candidate for the European elections as a means to the association's more general objectives, such as the struggle against the far right.

However, both during the meeting and in the course of numerous telephone conversations beforehand, the leadership's bid to mobilise a consensus in favour of Tapie's proposition came up against the determined opposition of several of the most important provincial committees as well as that of influential Parisian activists. As I indicate in the next section, the opposition of many grassroots members was based on the view that the association

would change its identity by accepting the offer. It was not simply a 'fear (*crainte*)' of the political field (as certain members of the National Bureau suggested during the meeting) which prevented such activists from accepting the offer, but rather an often complex and sophisticated distinction between (party) political action and associative action.

Finally, SOS-Racisme's president was constrained at the end of the meeting to work towards a reinforcement of the association's identity, in order to limit the damage caused by the whole incident. The threat to its cohesion represented by the potential departure of a significant fraction of the membership required the leadership to attempt to rebuild unity. Sylla did this at the close of the meeting by projecting an image of SOS-Racisme with which members on both sides of the argument could identify. During the debate, one of the most vocal opponents of an agreement with Tapie had argued that

The offer to appear on Tapie's list is a sign that our association is worth a lot and that is a tribute to you, Fodé, and to the association. Nevertheless, my view is that the association is worth more than M. Tapie can afford ... <sup>17</sup>

In his closing address Sylla referred explicitly to this statement, claiming that it neatly summarised the message which members should take away from the evening's debate. He repeated the phrase that SOS-Racisme was 'worth more than Tapie could afford', an action which appeared designed to reinforce a positive, valorising image of the association as well as imply that it (and the leadership) could not be 'bought'. In so doing, Sylla was endeavouring to ensure that the meeting ended with a measure of consensus and unity over the association's identity.

The definition of SOS-Racisme's identity as an anti-racist organisation had in fact been an important stake in the meeting itself. Speakers on both sides of

the debate had projected a number of different images of the association's identity in support of their arguments. In particular, those against the proposed action sought to mobilise opposition to the leadership by appealing to an historically important and consensual idea of SOS-Racisme's specificity. Part of the negotiation (or 'transaction' in Melucci's terms) between leaders and followers at the meeting, in other words, centred on the meaning and nature of the association itself.

## Debating political opportunities and organisational identity

As will become apparent in what follows, both leaders and grassroots members were engaged during the meeting in a cost-benefit calculation of the advantages and disadvantages associated with accepting Tapie's offer. Ideas about the nature of SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist organisation and its relationship to the political sphere (or, more precisely, the sphere of party politics) were also at stake. Although the leadership suggested at the time that members were reluctant to accept the offer simply out of a 'fear' of the political field, or because of a 'lack of maturity (*pas de maturité*)' of debate within the association, subsequent interviews with grassroots members revealed rather complex conceptions of the relationship between associative and (party) political action. In particular, the activists I interviewed tended to exhibit not an apprehension of politics but rather a strong, deeply-held commitment to SOS-Racisme's independence and freedom from political party influence.

The debate which Tapie's proposition provoked revealed the extent to which opinion differed as to the conditions under which (if at all) SOS-Racisme should enter the field of party politics. This divergence co-existed, however,



with significant agreement among members about the nature of the relationship between the association and young people. Arguments in favour of accepting the proposition for the 1994 European elections tended, for example, to suggest that there was a close relationship between Tapie and young people, on the one hand, and between SOS-Racisme and young people, on the other which, in turn, implied a convergence of interests between Tapie and SOS-Racisme. Although other representatives disputed the appropriateness of viewing Tapie as the champion of young people's interests – and thus rejected the equation advanced by those favourable to the proposal – they appeared generally (although not universally<sup>18</sup>) to agree with the idea that SOS-Racisme voiced the aspirations and convictions of young people. Nonetheless, as interviews I conducted with activists later confirmed, less of a consensus existed concerning the position which SOS-Racisme as such should adopt with respect to political party competition.

The issue of Tapie's appeal to young people was raised early on in the National Council meeting by one of the association's co-founders. He referred to a series of reports which had appeared in the French daily newspaper *Libération* that very morning (29 April 1994). These revealed that Tapie's level of popularity was highest among young, left-wing people, especially in the suburbs (*banlieues*). The newspaper also provided evidence that support for Tapie among these young people was indicative of their disaffection with other parties on the left such as the Socialists and the French Communist Party (subsequent analysis of voting behaviour at the election itself suggested a similar conclusion, see Grunberg 1995). Citing these reports the speaker argued that even though fellow activists might not find Tapie a particularly congenial figure, they could not simply reject him out of hand or ignore his appeal to a significant proportion of the French electorate. In particular, the fact that Tapie drew his support from the very

section of the population – urban young people sympathetic to the Left – which SOS-Racisme sought to involve in its campaigns was, in the view of this activist, an important reason for considering the proposition seriously.<sup>19</sup> A member of the National Bureau subsequently reiterated this point as a major reason for accepting Tapie's offer.

A degree of confirmation of these newspaper reports of Tapie's popularity among 18-25-year-olds was provided by a activist from Marseilles who emphasised that Tapie represented hope for disillusioned young people in the suburbs (*banlieues*). Later, another member of the National Bureau added that Tapie's appeal derived to a large extent from the fact that both his 'ordinary' background and use of vernacular language distinguished him from the rest of the French political class. By virtue of these characteristics and links with an important football club Tapie was, he concluded, 'not a politician like the others' in the eyes of many young people.<sup>20</sup>

As these comments make clear, for a number of National Bureau members as well as representatives of the Bouches-du-Rhône group (comprising the area around Marseilles), Tapie's popularity among young people was an important reason for giving his proposal serious consideration. An important corollary of this argument, which certain speakers took for granted or implied rather than stating explicitly, was that SOS-Racisme should be regarded as an association which was not only composed primarily of young people but also sought to reflect their interests directly in its campaigns. A former vice-president, for example, prefaced his intervention in the debate with the statement that: 'SOS is one of the few organisations today which is in touch with young people'.<sup>21</sup> In short, an argument in favour of accepting the proposition was built up gradually by

the assertion of two separate links (Tapie/youth, SOS-Racisme/youth) which together suggested a third (Tapie/SOS-Racisme).

However, activists opposed to entering into an agreement with Tapie questioned the extent to which he was actually concerned with promoting young people's interests. Another co-founder of the association and (at the time) member of the Revolutionary Communist League, for example, dismissed as 'populism' Tapie's much publicised comment that he would make unemployment illegal for those under 25 and require firms to hire hundreds of thousands of young people (cf. Buffotot and Hanley 1995: 5). According to this activist, the fact of the matter was that Tapie pursued his own commercial interests, not those of young people. Despite his undoubted popularity among this category of the population, the activist claimed that Tapie had long advocated policies detrimental to young people. In an important intervention in the debate, he added:

Tapie has a programme which is *anti*-young people. His policies would not solve the problem of unemployment but would actually make it worse. In my view, it is clear that Tapie is for the interests of big business, for 'the winners'. Is that our ethic (*morale*)? No, this association has a tradition of arguing for equality. Then there is the matter of the corruption allegations against Tapie. These are not side issues. Tapie represents the anti-model of the moral generation. For that reason, I recommend that we don't get mixed up in this at all. It would be a step backwards for our movement ...<sup>22</sup>

The description of Tapie as 'the anti-model of the moral generation' here is particularly interesting. In the mid-1980s, the phrase 'the moral generation' was coined in France as a way of referring to the group of young people who had reached adolescence in the period since the election of Mitterrand and the Left at the start of the decade. These young people were supposed to have abandoned political 'ideology' (i.e. the revolutionary ideals of the 1960s and early 1970s) in favour of a set of core moral values such as equality,

democracy, and solidarity (Joffrin 1987; Reynaud 1980). The young members of SOS-Racisme were widely regarded as emblematic figures of the so-called moral generation (see Joffrin 1987: 59-70; Dray 1987), and it is this image of the association to which the activist is appealing in the passage quoted above. Rather than highlighting a potential convergence of interests between Tapie, young people and SOS-Racisme (the strategy adopted by a section of the leadership), the activist in question emphasises a divergence of identity. He argues against accepting the proposition by emphasising the contrast between SOS-Racisme, a symbol of the moral generation, and Tapie a politician/businessman surrounded by corruption allegations.

A similar definition of SOS-Racisme's identity in terms of morality and an ethical stance was articulated by other activists during interviews conducted subsequently. An activist based in Paris, for example, acknowledged the potential benefits which the organisation would have been able to draw from Fodé Sylla's election to the European Parliament. Nevertheless, he insisted that this would have been outweighed by the damage inflicted on SOS's image. Alain summarised his position on Tapie's proposition as follows:

I personally was totally opposed to it. That is to say that if this business had gone ahead, I would have left [the association]. I have an image of moral conduct (*la morale*) which I associate with SOS-Racisme, even if there are struggles for power and so on (which seem to me to be rather inherent in the nature of things in the political realm). This was in total contradiction with the image of Tapie which is, in my view, an image of utter dishonesty, bad faith ... In no way could it be acceptable, as far as I was concerned. (Tape-recorded interview, 22 November 1994)<sup>23</sup>

The activist directly contrasts the image of SOS-Racisme as principled and 'moral' with that of Tapie as dishonest and corrupt. He too brings into play an historical representation of SOS-Racisme (as part of the 'moral generation') in order to justify his opposition to the proposition. This

emphasises once again how the assessment of political opportunities by activists was inextricably bound up with conceptions of the association's identity and public image.

The question of identity was also central for other activists, albeit in a slightly different way. As Laurence (another activist from the Paris region) stated in an interview, a key concern was SOS-Racisme's future identity *as an association*:

If Fodé [Sylla] joined Tapie's list, that would mean, as far as I'm concerned – and it's what I said within the association at the time – that SOS [-Racisme] would change its nature. It would no longer be an anti-racist association: an *association* would become a *political movement*. (Tape-recorded interview, 7 December 1994)<sup>24</sup>

For this activist, then, the implications of accepting Tapie's offer would be fundamental and far-reaching for the nature and identity of the organisation. The involvement of the association's president in the political field as a member of the European Parliament would change the way in which the association would be viewed by potential members. The danger of SOS-Racisme becoming a political movement would be that the association would thereby cut itself off from sections of the population. A first issue for this activist, therefore, was the possibility that accepting the offer would restrict the association's appeal and undermine its potential for becoming a mass movement. Secondly, however, associating SOS-Racisme politically with Tapie would fundamentally alter the nature of the organisation itself. Later in the interview Laurence used a fascinating analogy in order to clarify the difference between associative and more narrowly (party) political activism:

There is a saying which goes that an activist in an association is in the zone of the prophet and the political activist is in the zone of the king. So there is one who enlightens, who makes statements, who expresses values and convictions and so on, and there is another who carries things out, who acts ... It's not at all the same role. And personally I

want SOS [-Racisme] to continue in the role of a prophet because ... SOS [-Racisme] was a reference-point in society, it still is a reference-point. A reference-point for moral values, it has defended certain things, moral values. If you enter politics, the reference is no longer the same.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction here is between two different kinds of activity: on the one hand, action in an association which involves the expression and defence of moral values and convictions; and on the other, political action which is presented as more pragmatic, the putting into practice of certain policies or orientations. Both can be seen as part of the political process in the widest sense, but the distinction or separation of roles is a crucial one for this activist.

As the material examined in this section has demonstrated, the meeting of SOS-Racisme's National Council in April 1994 was the site of an important debate about the definition of political opportunities and the nature of the association's identity and public image. The section of the leadership favourable to Tapie's proposition for the 1994 European elections and those strongly opposed to it drew on and discussed a range of ideas about political and associative activism as well as SOS-Racisme's links with young people. Resistance to any form of agreement with Tapie was so strong among the grassroots members, for reasons I have highlighted, that the leadership was in the end forced to abandon any hope of realising this objective.

## Conclusion

The five years since the events discussed in this chapter have witnessed a dramatic upsurge of social movement activity in France. The massive public sector strikes of November-December 1995 (Mouriaux and Subileau 1996)



have been followed by a series of further protests by French workers (Wolfreys 1999), as well as hunger strikes and occupations by undocumented foreign residents or *sans-papiers* campaigning for residence permits (IM'média/REFLEX 1997), AIDS activism (Martel 1996: 213-322) and the winter 1997-1998 movement of the unemployed (Royall 1998). Against this background, the 'autonomy' of social movements from party political 'leadership' has emerged once again as a key issue for both activists and social scientists (see Aguiton and Corcuff 1999; Brochier and Delouche 2000: 163-178).

As far as leadership and autonomy within the anti-racist movement are concerned, two main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis presented in this chapter. Firstly, the different components of the leadership role distinguished by Melucci can create competing if not contradictory demands for leaders in concrete situations. The continued legitimacy of their own position and the movement's unity more generally may both depend on a leader's capacity to evaluate the potential advantages and disadvantages of particular courses of action and to assess members' need and priorities accurately when coming to a decision. Secondly, significant differences can exist between leaders and grassroots members of social movements over the nature and definition of political opportunities and collective identities. On the basis of the material examined here (and the more recent events alluded to above), future leadership strategies within the French anti-racist movement must acknowledge the importance attached by many grassroots members to 'autonomy' from political parties and the specificity and distinctiveness of associative activism. How to increase the anti-racist movement's political influence, while recognising this desire for independence, is a challenge which leaders will continue to face for some time to come.

## Postscript

The 1999 European elections resulted in an interesting twist to the events described in this chapter. In the months leading up to the poll, the autonomy and independence of social movement organisations with respect to political parties again became the subject of debate. This was not confined only to activist circles, but was conducted in and through the national press to a much greater extent than in 1994. As early as August 1998, in particular, a daily left-of-centre newspaper printed an 'Appeal for the autonomy of the social movement' which was to provoke a considerable amount of (at times very public) controversy (*Libération*, 3 August 1998). Signed by many prominent association activists, trade unionists and intellectuals, the appeal rejected the idea of 'a hierarchical and instrumental relationship between the social movement and the institutional mode of political representation'.<sup>26</sup> It implied that this conception was inducing certain (un-named) parties to consider forming lists of candidates for the forthcoming European elections which would include social movement actors. The appeal declared that such an initiative would be equivalent to the 'political utilisation (*utilisation politique*)' or domination of social movements and lead to a 'dead-end (*impasse*)'.

This assertion of autonomy was in fact a direct response to perceived moves by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) and the French Communist Party (PCF) to harness or exploit social movement action for their own ends. As one member later commented, the Revolutionary Communist League viewed its own role as providing political leadership around which left-wing forces could 'federate (*fédérer*)'. This Leninist conception of the relationship between party and social movement was, however, rejected by many

movement activists as out-dated or inappropriate. The Communist Party, on the other hand, was attempting to persuade prominent trade unionists and representatives of associations to stand as candidates on its list for the forthcoming European elections. Many (but not all) movement activists were similarly opposed to this strategy, dismissing it as 'pure electioneering (*une logique purement électorale*)'. Facing competition not only from the Greens but also from the far left LO-LCR coalition, the PCF was widely considered to be motivated primarily by a concern to protect or if possible boost its share of the vote in the June poll (see Brochier and Delouche 2000: 163-179).

In the months following the August 1998 appeal, the question of autonomy was debated with increasing intensity, as the Communist Party actively sought to 'open' its list of candidates for the European elections to social movement actors.<sup>27</sup> Although the PCF's initiative continued to be portrayed by many as a 'take-over (*récupération*)', a small number of movement activists eventually did decide to accept its offer. Indeed, when the Party finally published its list in February 1999, the first twelve candidates – those with a realistic chance of election (*une place d'éligible*) – included six non-Communists. Among these figured a trade unionist, several prominent feminists, and Fodé Sylla, who had recently resigned as president of SOS-Racisme amid reports of mounting criticism of his leadership within the association itself.<sup>28</sup>

Sylla's decision to stand as a candidate on the PCF list appeared to be underpinned by a sense of frustration at his previous lack of success, as president of an association, in influencing the political process. For example, he was quoted by a newspaper in mid-February as declaring:

I've had enough of people who make promises, who talk endlessly about young people, women, immigrants, but when you ask them about the right to vote the shutters go up! (*Le Monde*, 20 February 1999)<sup>29</sup>

This remark would have been interpreted as a scarcely veiled attack on the governing Socialist Party. As such, it echoes Harlem Désir's criticism in 1990 (discussed above) of the unresponsiveness of the party system – and the Socialists in particular – to outside pressure from anti-racist associations such as SOS-Racisme. In each case, a perception that the state was 'closed' to social movements and their demands led the individual involved to seek alternative means of influencing the political process. For both former presidents of SOS-Racisme, the June 1999 elections enabled them finally to realise this ambition: Sylla was elected to the European Parliament on the PCF list, while Désir successfully stood as a Socialist Party candidate (*L'Humanité*, 15 June 1999).<sup>30</sup>

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Silvia Kobi (University of Lausanne) for drawing my attention to the importance of the concept of political opportunity structure in her comments on an early version of this chapter presented at the conference 'Identité collective et représentation symbolique' held in Paris, 3-6 July 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Hoffman (1967), Cole (1997, 1998: 71-80) and Thody (1998). This focus is perhaps understandable, given the increased power conferred on the President of the Republic by the 1958 Constitution and the subsequent (albeit uneven) 'presidentialisation' of the French political system.

<sup>3</sup> This view of 'French exceptionalism' has been challenged by Appleton, who has argued that 'current trends show that on many dimensions France is not so atypical in terms of the organisation and activities of these NSMs' (Appleton 1999: 57). However, Appleton misses the point of the debate, which was about the *impact* of such movements not their 'organisation and activities'.

<sup>4</sup> Appleton has argued recently, however, that 'the portrayal of the French state as "closed" reverts to some of the more stereotypical views of it and ignores the important literature in both English and French on the real impacts of deconcentration and decentralisation' (1999: 73). To a certain extent this is true, although the state in France remains more centralised and 'closed' to external demands than in the other countries in Kriesi's study (Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands).

<sup>5</sup> '... de favoriser l'émergence d'un "pôle réformiste", indépendant du Parti socialiste, avant l'élection présidentielle de 1995.'

<sup>6</sup> The notes I took during the meeting also reveal an enormous disparity in the amount of participation by male and female activists in the debate. Including Sylla's opening and closing statements, I recorded twenty-nine separate interventions in the debate from twenty-two different speakers. Of these, *only one* was by a female member of the association (the comment quoted in note 16 below), despite the fact that at least a third of those present in the amphitheatre were women. This is consistent with studies in

educational and other contexts which have highlighted men's and women's 'differential access to talk' and the variety of factors on which it depends (Graddol and Swann 1989: 69-94). In the case of the National Council debate, the latter would undoubtedly include age and status (the representatives of the provincial committees tended to be men in their forties, while many of the younger men were members of the National Bureau), but possibly also the 'gendered' appeal of Tapie himself, given his prominent association with a major football club. In the absence of more substantial data, however, these must be viewed only as hypotheses.

<sup>7</sup> 'La création d'un parti politique serait-elle le seul moyen qu'il nous reste pour nous faire entendre?'

<sup>8</sup> 'Comment faire face à ce genre de proposition?' was the question Sylla posed.

<sup>9</sup> Sylla made this point several times, stating that 'Je ne partirai pas si je n'ai pas l'association derrière...', and 'Il n'est pas question de partir sans l'association.'

<sup>10</sup> 'Est-ce qu'on est ici pour discuter de l'éventuelle présence du président de SOS-Racisme sur les listes européennes ou non?'

<sup>11</sup> 'Ce qui est un peu scandaleux, c'est qu'en fait ... il y a eu aucune consultation [...]. Donc en fait la décision qui devait être prise soi-disant en commun était faussée parce que Fodé Sylla déjà même avant cette réunion savait qu'il n'appartiendrait pas à cette liste. ... Alors là encore, aucun débat démocratique. Vraiment, ça s'est fait ... C'était lutte de pouvoir, une lutte d'apparatchiks entre eux, mais sans que les militants de base soient un peu informés sur la situation.'

<sup>12</sup> 'T'avais l'impression qu'il y avait eu une discussion au-dessus, des pressions ...' (Tape-recorded interview with Didier, 28 November 1994)

<sup>13</sup> '... toutes les dérives passées et actuelles visant à subordonner le combat antiraciste à des intérêts extérieurs à celui-ci et plus proche de la manœuvre aventuriste, voire de la magouille, que d'une volonté de faire avancer la construction d'un cadre collectif capable de peser pour l'égalité des droits.'

<sup>14</sup> 'Alors, ce qui m'a le plus frappé dans cette histoire, c'est le manque de conscience politique d'un certain nombre de mes camarades, notamment du Bureau national, qui leur rend prêts à toutes les alliances et atteint un certain opportunisme. C'est à dire: "Oui, mais Tapie, il plaît dans les banlieues." Oui, mais bon, c'est pas parce qu'un certain nombre de gens se gourent que l'association doit adhérer à cette erreur.'



<sup>15</sup> 'Déjà ce qui est dramatique dans cette histoire, c'est que ... ce CN [Conseil national] qui avait lieu, les gens étaient prévenus un jour avant. C'est à dire que les trois quarts des provinciaux dont les Toulousains qui faisaient partie de ceux qui s'étaient opposés fermement à ce projet, ont eu énormément de mal à ... venir participer à la décision. Moi, j'étais prévenu un jour avant par téléphone.'

<sup>16</sup> The phrase 'On risque de laisser passer [or 'rater'] le train' was used by three separate speakers, while a fourth described Tapie's offer as 'une opportunité ... un train qui passe qu'il faut prendre'.

<sup>17</sup> 'L'invitation de la part de Tapie est un signe que notre association vaut cher. C'est un hommage à toi, Fodé, et à l'association. Je pense néanmoins que notre association vaut plus cher que M. Tapie peut payer.' The speaker was Gérard Filoche (see section of Appendix 2 on the Revolutionary Communist League [LCR]).

<sup>18</sup> Thus, one older activist insisted: '*Il faut s'adresser à l'ensemble de la société ... pas qu'à la jeunesse.* (We need to address society as a whole ... not only young people.)'

<sup>19</sup> The actual phrase used was: 'Tapie mord sur un public, les jeunes, qui est aussi le nôtre.' The verb 'mordre sur' literally means 'to make a dent in, to eat into'. Its figurative use here conjures up an intriguing image of the relationship between the parties involved!

<sup>20</sup> 'Il n'est pas un homme politique comme les autres.'

<sup>21</sup> 'SOS est une des rares organisations aujourd'hui qui est en rythme avec la jeunesse.' The speaker was Malek Boutih, who was subsequently to become president of SOS-Racisme (see Postscript).

<sup>22</sup> 'Le programme de Tapie est un programme *anti-jeunes*. Sa politique ne résoudrait pas le chômage mais l'aggraverait. Pour moi c'est clair que Tapie est pour l'entreprise, pour les "gagnants". C'est notre morale, ça? Non, la tradition de cette association est pour l'égalité. Et puis, il y a les histoires de corruption. Ce ne sont pas des histoires secondaires. Tapie représente l'antimodèle de la génération morale. Alors je conseille qu'on ne mette pas un petit doigt derrière ça. Ça serait une régression pour notre mouvement.' Once more, the speaker is Gérard Filoche.

<sup>23</sup> 'Moi, j'y étais totalement opposé. C'est à dire que si cette affaire s'était faite, je serais parti. J'ai une image de la morale que j'associe à SOS même s'il y a des phénomènes de pouvoir et tout ça (qui me semblent inhérents un peu à la nature des choses dans le domaine politique). Là, c'était en totale

contradiction avec l'image de Tapie qui est, à mon avis, une image de la malhonnêteté complète quoi, vraiment l'image de la malhonnêteté, la mauvaise foi. [...] Il ne pouvait absolument pas pour moi être acceptable.'

<sup>24</sup> 'Si Fodé rentre sur la liste de Tapie, ça veut dire que, pour moi – et c'est ce que j'ai dit au sein de l'association à ce moment-là – SOS changerait de nature. Elle n'est plus une association antiraciste: une *association* devient un *mouvement politique*.'

<sup>25</sup> 'Il y avait une phrase d'antan qui disait que le président d'une association il est dans la zone du prophète et le militant politique il est dans la zone du roi. Donc il y en a un qui éclaire, qui dit des choses, qui exprime des valeurs, des convictions et cetera, et il y a un autre qui exécute, qui fait ...C'est pas du tout le même rôle. Et moi je veux que SOS reste dans le rôle du prophète parce que ... SOS était un référent dans la société, c'est encore un référent. Un référent de valeurs morales, elle a défendu des choses, dont les valeurs morales. Si tu rentres dans le jeu politique, ce n'est plus la même référence.'

<sup>26</sup> 'un rapport hiérarchisé et instrumentalisé du mouvement social vis-à-vis du mode de représentation politique institutionnel.' (Appel pour l'autonomie du mouvement social)

<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note, therefore, that in three successive European elections (1990, 1994 and 1998) relatively small French parties (the Greens, MRG and PCF respectively) sought to boost their electoral performance by attracting well-known figures from outside the party to stand as their candidates. This raises a number of questions which I am not able to consider here. For example, to what extent were each the parties involved 'in decline'? Also, is this 'openness' only found in European elections? If so, what does this tell us about the relative importance which is attached to such elections by political elites?

<sup>28</sup> From 1996 onwards, Sylla's positions on immigration quotas and the regularisation of undocumented resident foreigners had also resulted in a significant loss of credibility in wider activist circles (see Alaux 1996). He was replaced by Malek Boutih, a former vice-president of SOS-Racisme, the association's first Franco-Maghrebian president, and a leading member of the Socialist Left current within the Socialist Party (*Le Monde*, 17 March 1999).

<sup>29</sup> 'J'en ai marre des gens qui font des promesses, qui parlent sans cesse des jeunes, des femmes, des immigrés, et puis qui disent : le droit de vote? Rideau, la tête à Toto.'

<sup>30</sup> In the light of this, it is difficult not to agree with Mogniss Abdallah's comment (2000: 75) that: 'It has to be admitted that SOS-Racisme has put in place a training school for political cadres capable of renewing its recruitment of young people and training new anti-racist elites. (*C'est là qu'il faut bien reconnaître à SOS Racisme la mise en place d'une école de formation de cadres politiques capable de renouveler son recrutement dans la jeunesse et de former de nouvelles élites antiracistes.*)'

## Chapter 9

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### Constitutional Reform, Asylum Rights and Protest Mobilisation

The focus of this chapter is on SOS-Racisme's campaign in the autumn of 1993 to mobilise opposition to a government proposal to reform the constitutional right to asylum. This was the centre-point of the association's activity at a national level during the first five months of my fieldwork, and I was able to follow it almost from beginning to end. The chapter focuses on two main themes. The first is the way in which SOS-Racisme sought in a newspaper article and in the leaflets it distributed at demonstrations and elsewhere to portray the centre-right government as undermining 'the republican tradition' of asylum rights in France, and itself as the defender of that same tradition. The second is the association's media strategy: the example here is its use of a controversial poster in order to attract media attention and publicise its campaign against the reform of asylum rights. The two themes are inter-linked as one of the issues which arose in internal debates about the poster was its role as a mobilising tool.

## Schengen, Asylum Rights and Constitutional Reform

One of the first pieces of legislation to be introduced by the new centre-right government which was elected in 1993 was proposed by Charles Pasqua, the Interior Minister, and concerned the entry and residence rights of foreigners (Costa-Lascoux 1994b). The Socialist Party and the French Communist Party opposition were unable to prevent the passing of the Pasqua Laws<sup>1</sup> in July 1993 as they held only a tiny minority of the seats in the National Assembly. However, they immediately referred a number of the provisions set out in the Pasqua Laws to the Constitutional Court which is responsible for ensuring that new legislation does not infringe the French Constitution. On 13 August 1993, the Constitutional Court delivered a judgement in which it censured eight articles contained in the Pasqua Laws (*Libération*, 16 August 1993) as being unconstitutional. The Court's decision provoked a political controversy in which the alleged political bias of its members and the nature of the cohabitation between a right-wing Prime minister (Balladur) and a left-wing President (Mitterrand) were central points of contention.

Over the next four months this debate was played out primarily in relation to the article of the Pasqua Laws regarding the right to asylum and whether, in the light of the Court's decision to censure it, a reform of the Constitution was necessary to implement the Schengen Agreement. It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to provide a detailed account of the controversy provoked by the Constitutional Court's judgement concerning the Pasqua Laws. Nevertheless, a brief outline of the debate surrounding the reform of the Constitution is necessary before I turn to consider the strategies deployed by SOS-Racisme to oppose restriction of asylum rights.

Article 24 of the 1993 Pasqua Laws removed an asylum-seeker's right to make an application for asylum in France if a previous request had been refused by another EU member state. According to Pasqua, this change was necessary in order to implement the provisions on the responsibility for dealing with asylum requests contained in the Schengen Agreement, to which France was a signatory state. The original Schengen Agreement was signed by France, Germany and the Benelux countries on 14 June 1985, and was followed by the Schengen Implementation Agreement on 19 June 1990. The Agreement was subsequently incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty.

The Schengen Agreement's stated objective was to promote the free movement of citizens of EU member states, as well as of goods and services, through the gradual abolition of controls at common internal borders (see Fernhout 1993; O'Keefe 1995; Philip 1994). The removal of internal border checks, however, was held to require 'compensatory' measures at external borders in order to control the movements of immigrants into the territory covered by the Agreement (1985 Schengen Agreement, Article 17). As a result, the Schengen Agreements of 1985 and 1990 contained, among other provisions, measures designed to introduce a common visa policy and to facilitate the harmonisation of asylum policy among the participating member states.

With respect to the right to asylum, the 1990 Schengen Implementation Agreement set out a framework for determining which one of the member states party to it was responsible for examining any given asylum request (Title 2, Chapter 7). As a result, an asylum-seeker was prevented from making a series of applications in different EU countries, so-called 'asylum shopping' (cf. d'Oliveira 1993). In other words, Schengen introduced a division of responsibility between its signatory states concerning the



treatment of asylum applications. One state (usually the state of first entry) was defined as responsible for considering a request for asylum and, if this was refused, for ensuring the deportation of the asylum-seeker from the Schengen area. For example, if a refugee were to request asylum in Germany, after being refused asylum in France, it would be the responsibility of the French government to take that person back and ultimately to deport them.

In summary, the Schengen Agreement identified which signatory state had the responsibility for dealing with an individual request for asylum and was intended, at least in part, to prevent asylum seekers from making a series of requests in different EU countries. Article 24 of the 1993 Pasqua Laws was presented as an application of this provision of the Schengen Agreement. It held that a person could not register at the OFPRA (the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons) if they had already had a request for asylum refused in another EU member state.

However, in its ruling dated 13 August 1993, the Constitutional Court found this Article (and a further seven) to be contrary to the French Constitution. More specifically, the Court ruled that the asylum provision of the Pasqua Laws contravened Article 4 of the Preamble to the 1946 Constitution which holds that: 'Anyone persecuted because of his pursuit of liberty has the right to asylum within the territories of the Republic.'<sup>2</sup> The Court judged that the French Republic had an obligation (*devoir*) to respect the right to asylum on its territory, whatever conditions application of the Schengen and Dublin Agreements imposed (*Libération*, 16 August 1993).

The French Interior Minister, Charles Pasqua, reacted angrily to the Constitutional Court's ruling and claimed that it rendered the Schengen Agreement inapplicable. According to Pasqua, the abolition of internal

border controls could not take place without the 'compensatory measure (*mesure compensatoire*)' represented by the introduction of a division of responsibility with respect to asylum requests. He claimed, furthermore, that the Court's decision that the Republic had a duty to consider a request for asylum even if a person's application had been refused in another European country would lead to a 'considerable increase (*augmentation considérable*)' in the number of requests made in France. Consequently, Pasqua concluded that a reform of the Constitution would be required in order to implement the Schengen Agreement (*Libération*, 16 August 1993).

Pasqua subsequently proposed that a new clause be introduced into the Constitution making the treatment of asylum requests of persons having transited by another European country a matter of discretion rather than obligation. The need for such a reform was, however, contested by a number of jurists who argued that a legislative solution was possible and emphasised that in a previous decision (27 July 1991) the Constitutional Court had ruled that Schengen was not incompatible with the Constitution (*Le Monde*, 3 September 1993). Political commentators, on the other hand, speculated that Pasqua had ulterior motives in pushing for a reform of the Constitution. In particular, it was suggested that Pasqua's decision was a purely political one designed to put pressure on Mitterrand (whose consent would be required for the Constitutional amendment to be passed). The intended effect of the proposed reform, it was claimed, was to push Mitterrand into choosing between his commitment to European construction (Schengen) and his defence of human rights (asylum policy) (*Le Monde*, 3 September 1993. Cf. Keraudren 1994). In spite of these reservations and a concerted campaign on the part of anti-racist, immigrant and human rights organisations the reform was passed on 20 November 1993.

## The Campaign Against the Reform of the Constitution

At the same time as the political and juridical debates were being played out a number of anti-racist, human rights and immigrant organisations launched a campaign to mobilise public opinion against any reform of the Constitution which would restrict asylum rights. In the remainder of this chapter I focus on several of the strategies deployed by one anti-racist association – SOS-Racisme – both independently and as part of a wider network of organisations to oppose Pasqua's proposed amendment of the French Constitution. I analyse in turn a newspaper article and a poster produced by SOS-Racisme in the course of a three month period (September-November 1993). In so doing, my aim is to identify the bases upon which SOS-Racisme sought to mobilise the French population in defence of the right to asylum. An evaluation of the extent to which the contemporary anti-racist movement in France is in crisis can only proceed, I would argue, from such a critical investigation of specific recent campaigns.

An important reason for focusing on SOS-Racisme's campaign against the reform of the Constitution in the autumn of 1993 lies – as was the case in the last chapter – in the relative novelty of the political context within which it was launched. As I have explained in earlier chapters, SOS-Racisme was founded in 1984, that is, during the Socialists' first period in office (1981-1986). Although the relationship between the association and the Socialist Party is more complicated than many commentators have recognised (Closets 1990; Yonnet 1993), it is true that substantial grants from Jack Lang's Culture Ministry contributed significantly to SOS-Racisme's early success and high media profile (see Chapter 1). In the latter half of the decade, the link between the Socialist Party and SOS-Racisme evolved, partly as an effect

of shifts in the balance of power between different tendencies (associated with Mitterrand and Rocard respectively) within the former. Nevertheless, the association continued to maintain close ties with the Party, in particular through the presence on its National Bureau of members of the Socialist Left tendency of the Socialist Party. This is headed by a deputy named Julien Dray who was a key player in the creation of SOS-Racisme and continues to exert an important (even determining) influence on the political positions it adopts (see Chapters 8 and 10).

The victory of a centre-right UDF-RPR coalition at the legislative elections in March 1993 potentially represented a more far-reaching transformation of the political context than the election of Chirac as Prime Minister in 1986. The defeat inflicted on the Socialists was crushing, resulting in an overwhelming majority for the UDF-RPR government under Balladur in the National Assembly. This collapse in the electoral support for the Socialists was followed by a period devoted to rethinking and rebuilding the Left. Its immediate consequence in the autumn of 1993, however, was a significant de-mobilisation of party activists which was apparent throughout the campaign against the reform of the Constitution to restrict asylum rights. The Socialist Party (and the PCF for that matter) played a very minor role both in the political and media debate about the right to asylum and in the concomitant mobilisation of activist organisations in its defence (*Le Monde*, 3-4 October and 15 October 1993).

The implications of the dramatic change in the political landscape occasioned by the 1993 legislative elections were highlighted by Fodé Sylla, the president of SOS-Racisme, in his opening address to the association's National Council meeting in Paris on 26 September 1993. The demoralisation of the Left in the aftermath of the elections, he argued, required SOS-Racisme

to adopt a pro-active and offensive stance vis-à-vis the government and Pasqua's proposed reform of the Constitution. In particular, he claimed that Mitterrand would not intervene unless a 'social movement (*mouvement social*)' emerged expressing its opposition to a restriction of asylum rights. It was, however, difficult to identify the potential source of any such mobilisation in the current political context. Left-wing party activists were in the process of analysing the reasons for their defeat in the elections and other anti-racist and human rights organisations were, according to Sylla, adopting a wait-and-see policy (*attentisme*) with respect to asylum reform. Certain organisations were even advising against attempting to plan demonstrations for fear that a poor turn-out would only demoralise activists even further.

After highlighting the demoralised state of left-wing (party and organisational) activists, Sylla stressed that it would consequently be incumbent on SOS-Racisme to mobilise resistance to Pasqua's proposed reform of the Constitution. He argued repeatedly that SOS-Racisme needed to be the 'driving-force (*animateur*)' behind opposition to the government, if necessary 'dragging along (*entraîner*)' other organisations in its wake. It was imperative, he continued, to confront head-on the government's proposed limitation of the right to asylum and the rhetoric it was currently employing when addressing immigration-related issues. Rather than passively waiting for Pasqua's next move, there was a need for SOS-Racisme 'to go on the offensive (*mener des actions offensives*)', giving press interviews, planning demonstrations and organising public meetings in schools, universities and other workplaces. Although calling for joint strategies involving a range of activist groups, he concluded that SOS-Racisme should be at the forefront of the battle against the reform of the Constitution.

SOS-Racisme was subsequently to play a prominent part in the organisation of a series of demonstrations in Paris against the reform of the Constitution and a public meeting bringing together a range of 'experts' (jurists, sociologists, politicians, human rights activists) to debate the right to asylum. In addition, the association produced a series of leaflets which it distributed in an attempt to mobilise public opinion against the Pasqua Laws and the restriction of asylum rights. Alongside these strategies, however, SOS-Racisme also published an article in the daily newspaper *Le Monde* and produced a poster as part of its campaign against the Constitutional amendment. I will conclude this section by commenting briefly on the article. The next section will provide a more detailed discussion of the poster, with a view to identifying the ways in which SOS-Racisme sought to mobilise public and political opinion through this means.

On 24 September 1993 the daily newspaper *Le Monde* published an article by Fodé Sylla, the president of SOS-Racisme, entitled 'The Duty to Welcome (*Le devoir d'accueil*)'. The article sets out to refute a number of arguments concerning 'illegal' immigration and the right to asylum which had been advanced by the government in order to justify its decision to propose a Constitutional amendment. In the first section, Sylla challenges Pasqua's claim that only a 'technical' and 'limited' reform of the right to asylum is being envisaged:

Behind the softly-softly approach and the reassuring argument about a simple legal modification necessitated by the application of the Schengen Agreement, what is in fact at stake is an attempt to break with the Republican tradition.<sup>3</sup>

What is interesting here is the way in which Sylla presents Pasqua's proposal as not a relatively minor reform but rather as an assault on a part of the country's republican heritage. In a similar way, the petition which the



association launched at around the same time presented the right to asylum as 'the honour of the Republic and of international society (*l'honneur de la République et de la société internationale*)' (SOS-Racisme petition 'Contre toute réforme du droit d'asile', October 1993). In both cases, the association sought to portray itself as a defender of republican values and institutions under attack from the members of the government (this is a point I develop further in this next chapter).

### 'A refugee named Charles de Gaulle'

In the following section I present an analysis of the poster which played an important part in attracting media attention to SOS-Racisme's campaign against proposals to reform the constitutional right to asylum. I discuss both the 'symbolic economy (*économie symbolique*)' (Ramognino 1994) of the poster itself and also the different responses which it provoked among members of the association in the course of a National Council meeting in September 1993. I argue that the internal debate sparked off by the poster revealed conflicting interpretations of the nature of the campaign in which SOS-Racisme was involved and the political orientation it should adopt.

High profile and often controversial posters became a trademark of SOS-Racisme during the 1980s and the poster used as part of the asylum rights campaign was, in this respect, no exception (see Figure 9). It takes the form of a photograph of Charles de Gaulle, in his General's képi, beside which is printed an identification sheet containing the following information: 'Name: De Gaulle; Surname: Charles [sic]; Occupation: Général; Entry: June 40; Status: Political Refugee'.<sup>4</sup> At the bottom of the photograph the following two sentences have been added: 'M. Pasqua, it is a good thing that countries



Figure 9 SOS-Racisme Poster: 'Non à la réforme du droit d'asile'

respected the right to asylum in 1940. No to the reform of the right to asylum.<sup>15</sup> In much smaller letters underneath the association's name, address, symbol (the hand) and telephone number complete the poster.

I present a detailed analysis of reactions to the poster later in this section, but a brief explanation will be provided here as a way in to discussing the debate which it provoked in the press and at SOS-Racisme's National Council meeting in September 1993. The photograph captures de Gaulle in military uniform (clearly indicated by the képi) and dates back to the Second World War when he led the Free French opposition to the Vichy régime (see Cobban 1965: 195). The identification sheet which accompanies the photograph makes reference to the fact that in June 1940 de Gaulle escaped to London where he was granted political asylum by the British authorities. At an immediate level, therefore, the poster recalls a specific historical moment when the survival of de Gaulle, a national hero who was subsequently to be elected (in 1958) as the first president of the Fifth Republic, depended upon the existence of the right to asylum in another country.

However, the poster plays not only on de Gaulle's role as a symbol of national resistance but also as the founder of the party political tradition in France which bears his name. A Gaullist party, the Union pour la Nouvelle République (UNR), was formed in the run-up to the 1958 legislative elections with a view to securing support in the National Assembly for de Gaulle's government. It was subsequently to undergo a series of transformations, culminating in the founding, in 1976, of the neo-Gaullist Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) under the leadership of Jacques Chirac. As both a political philosophy and a party apparatus, therefore, Gaullism has survived the death of de Gaulle in 1970. Indeed, as the right's victory in the 1993

elections was to testify, it continues to exert a significant influence on contemporary French politics in the Fifth Republic (see Hazareesingh 1994: 261-287).

An awareness of these aspects of the history of post-war French politics, the emergence of a specific political tradition identified with de Gaulle, enables us to appreciate the finer point which the poster is making. As the president and vice-president of SOS-Racisme wrote at the time: 'We were anxious to address the Interior Minister [Pasqua], who initiated this law, and to remind him that Gaullism itself was born in exile' (*Le Monde*, 4 September 1993).<sup>6</sup> In other words, the poster calls Pasqua's attention to the fact that the Gaullist political tradition with which he is identified, as a member of the RPR party, can be traced back to the period when its founder, de Gaulle, was granted asylum by Britain. The implication is, of course, that had Britain not respected the right to asylum in 1940 the political family to which Pasqua and many of his government colleagues belonged would not have materialised. In short, the poster urges Pasqua not to reform the right to asylum by reminding him that ultimately it made possible his own political existence.

SOS-Racisme launched the poster towards the end of September 1993 and it immediately provoked a storm of protest among RPR deputies which was widely covered by the press. Jean-Louis Debré, who subsequently succeeded Pasqua as Interior Minister but at the time was assistant General Secretary and Spokesperson of the RPR, stated that the poster had aroused the 'indignation' of his fellow Gaullists:

The Gaullists, better than anyone, know what our country owes to Great Britain, to the courage and goodwill of the British people during the Second World War ... France and Great Britain have historically always been at the forefront of the battle for human rights

and freedom, and they will remain so in the future. (*Le Monde*, 4 October 1993)<sup>7</sup>

As Debré's communiqué indicates, RPR députés objected to what they perceived as a questioning both of the party's acknowledgement of France's historical debt to Britain and, more generally, of its commitment to human rights. The use of the image of de Gaulle to score such party political points, they maintained, was inappropriate.

A similar argument was advanced by Daniel Amson in the daily newspaper *Le Quotidien de Paris*.<sup>8</sup> For Amson, the key issue raised by the poster was the legitimacy of using national symbols such as de Gaulle for 'partisan' or factional ends. He declared his own position on this matter to be the following:

Historical figures, by virtue of the very fact that they are a part of the common heritage of the nation, cannot lend themselves to partisan use. ... Unless I am mistaken, General de Gaulle never spoke on the subject of the right to asylum. It is, therefore, improper today to invoke his memory in support of an argument which no-one can say if he would have criticised or defended. (*Le Quotidien de Paris*, 4 October 1993).<sup>9</sup>

This short passage is, in my view, worth considering in some detail for it highlights the complex position of de Gaulle in French political history and the reason why the poster was to prove so controversial.

In the first sentence quoted above, Amson states that de Gaulle's historic contribution to the French nation is such that it transcends political divisions. The implication here is that, as in some sense an embodiment of the nation at a particular point in its history (the Second World War), de Gaulle stands outside – or, more accurately perhaps, above – the arena of party politics. This is, of course, the impression which de Gaulle himself subsequently sought to foster during his presidency (1958-69), by emphasising his distance



from the Gaullist party, the UNR, during this period (see Hazareesingh 1994: 268).<sup>10</sup> In the first part of his article, Amson reintroduces this notion of de Gaulle as being 'above politics' through representing him as belonging to the nation's heritage as a whole and not to any one group within it. From this it follows, at least for Amson, that the poster can be criticised for its illegitimate use of a national symbol to promote the opinions of a particular political faction or movement.

It should be noted, however, that in the original passage quoted above Amson levels a second criticism at the poster which differs slightly from the one which has just been outlined. As well as condemning the poster's 'partisan' use of an historical figure of national importance, he also accuses SOS-Racisme of attempting, in effect, to put words into de Gaulle's mouth. Briefly stated, his point appears to be that the poster fosters the impression that de Gaulle personally would have supported the association's position in the current conflict with the government over the right to asylum. According to Amson, such an assumption is unwarranted owing to the fact that de Gaulle's own views on the general question of asylum rights were never formally recorded. As a result, it is impossible to know whether he would have agreed or disagreed with SOS-Racisme's campaign. In the light of this Amson contends that it is unacceptable for the poster to identify de Gaulle even implicitly or indirectly with a particular stance on the right to asylum.

Amson's second objection thus rests on the assumption that the poster attempts to align de Gaulle himself, as a political actor, with the position adopted by SOS-Racisme vis-à-vis the government's reform of asylum rights. On this reading, a fundamental issue is whether de Gaulle can hypothetically be regarded as, in linguistic terms, an 'enunciative source (*source énonciative*)'<sup>11</sup> of the phrase 'M. Pasqua, it is a good thing that countries



respected the right to asylum in 1940' printed at the bottom of the poster. In other words, could this statement conceivably be attributed to de Gaulle himself, rather than or as well as to 'SOS-Racisme'? As we have seen, Amson would answer that it is wrong to do so since any views which de Gaulle may have held about the right to asylum are not publicly known.

Although there is an apparent logic and plausibility to Amson's critique of the poster, I would argue that in an important way it simply misses the point. The question of whether de Gaulle would have supported or opposed SOS-Racisme's campaign against asylum reform is surely a side-issue if not an irrelevance. The poster is not concerned with de Gaulle's views as such on the right to asylum but highlights instead the fact that during the Second World War he was a political refugee in Britain (as emphasised by the inclusion of an identification sheet in English beside the photograph). It is the relationship between de Gaulle's war-time status as an exile and his subsequent role in founding the political tradition bearing his name to which the poster draws attention. Moreover, as the president and vice-president of SOS-Racisme indicate in the extract from the *Le Monde* article quoted earlier, the poster was intended as a vehicle for the association to remind Pasqua of the circumstances in which Gaullism originated. The pointed comment addressed to Pasqua at the bottom of the poster is thus articulated by the 'SOS-Racisme' named underneath and not by the figure 'frozen' in the photograph.

However, in spite of the limited value of Amson's analysis of the poster his remarks do serve to emphasise the complexity of de Gaulle's place in French history, as both a national hero and president 'above politics' and a (party) political actor. As I have already mentioned, during the period of his presidency de Gaulle sought to distance himself from the system of party

politics and, in particular, from the Gaullist party, the UNR. If we take voting behaviour as an indicator, de Gaulle was indeed successful in raising the presidential institution above traditional political divisions. The changes he introduced, by means of referenda, to the Constitution (1958), Algerian self-determination (1961) and election of the president (1962) attracted a level of electoral support far beyond that enjoyed by the UNR. Nevertheless, as Hazareesingh has pointed out, a 1967 opinion poll revealed that 'almost two-thirds' of those questioned considered that de Gaulle 'acted primarily as the leader of the majority Gaullist party' rather than in an independent manner (1994: 268-9). There is some evidence, then, that the public perception of de Gaulle, particularly near the end of his presidency, identified him with a partisan stance, implicated in rather than above party politics.

The preceding comments underline the dual nature of de Gaulle's legacy and corresponding image in contemporary France. On the one hand, he stands as a symbol of national resistance and post-war unity; on the other, he represents a particular ideological current in French politics. SOS-Racisme's poster plays on the tension between these aspects. However, within the association itself there were contrasting evaluations of the poster's effectiveness when it was presented by the National Bureau to members assembled for a national meeting in September 1993.

A number of members commented on the poster in the discussion which followed. One activist stated: 'It doesn't shock me (*Ca me choque pas*)', describing the poster more as a 'wall photograph (*une photo de mur*)' which was pleasing to look at but did not grab your attention. A second member disagreed, claiming that the poster would succeed in attracting people's attention by its unusualness. It was not customary for large pictures of de Gaulle to appear on the streets of the outlying estates and this would induce

people to look more closely. The heaviest criticism was levelled at the poster by a representative from Toulouse who asserted that not everyone could be expected to know the history behind the poster, especially young people 'in the suburbs (*en banlieue*)'. It would, as a result, be necessary to explain it. The same activist also expressed some scepticism about the effect the poster would have on the members of the Gaullist RPR party and whether it would indeed cause pressure to be brought on Pasqua by his colleagues. A more positive assessment was made by a fourth speaker who suggested that the poster was effective since by portraying de Gaulle as an asylum-seeker it separated the right to asylum from immigration. He found it 'interesting (*intéressante*)' and said that it did not merit 'the wrath (*les foudres*)' which it was incurring.

As these comments indicate, a range of evaluative criteria were employed by the members of SOS-Racisme who voiced their reaction to the poster at this meeting. I would like, however, to draw out the implications of just one of the remarks cited above: that young people in the outlying estates would not understand the poster. The speaker here raises the issue of the identity of the intended addressee of the poster: who is going to be looking at it? Most obviously the poster situates Pasqua himself in the position of spectator. The association repeated this strategy in a subsequent poster protesting against the Interior Minister's immigration legislation which made it more difficult for French nationals to marry a person not having French nationality. The later poster contained a photograph of a white woman and a black man hugging each other with the caption: 'Mixed couples (*les couples mixtes*) wish M. and Mme Pasqua a Happy Valentine's Day.' (The association's more recent posters have adopted a different strategy.) As far as the poster of de Gaulle was concerned, however, the president of SOS-Racisme explained at the meeting that one of its aims was to play on divisions internal to the RPR

in the hope that Pasqua's colleagues would bring pressure to bear on him to withdraw the constitutional reform. In other words, the poster was directed at 'the political class' more generally.

The activist whose comments I have cited, however, questions the impact of the poster on an addressee of a radically different nature. This person is young and lives in the suburbs of one of the large conurbations which implies, given the social and 'racial' segregation of urban space, that she or he is also likely to be poor, working-class and black (the term 'banlieue' has the same sort of connotations as 'inner cities' has in Britain). The question asks, in other words, about the effect of the poster on young people who might be willing to join the association.

There appears to be a tension here between the leadership's and provincial activists' understandings of the principal 'constituency' which the poster was designed to mobilise. The leadership clearly intended it to bring pressure to bear on Pasqua within his own party to withdraw proposals to amend the Constitutional right to asylum. The activist quoted above, however, appeared to view the function of the poster as also (or even essentially) being to mobilise the wider public to participate in its demonstrations and encourage them to bring pressure to bear on the politicians. There appears to be a difference of appreciation about which of these two should have priority: is the poster's primary purpose to play on internal tensions in the RPR party (in which case all the contextual information necessary to 'read' the poster could be safely taken for granted: de Gaulle as founder of RPR, war-time experiences in Britain and status)? Or is it primarily intended as a tool for mobilising public protest (in which case the 'readability' of the poster is a real issue)? The leadership and sections of the membership appeared to take the former view, while some of the provincial representatives adopted

the latter. The question is the type of 'opinion' which was to be influenced and mobilised: the political elite and existing activists, or potential members and the public more generally. This leads on, finally, to the issue of the nature and role of SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist association. The tension which I discussed in Chapter 2 between a conception of SOS-Racisme as, on the one hand, primarily engaged in national campaigns to influence public opinion, or, on the other, a grassroots organisation committed to concrete, daily action against racism, is present below the surface here again.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the varied types of protest and conventional action which were involved in SOS-Racisme's 1993 campaign against proposals to reform the constitutional right to asylum. Various constituencies were targeted in the course of the campaign. Mobilisation of the public in forms of protest such as street demonstrations was attempted through an appeal to defend 'the republican tradition' from attack by the centre-right government. A letter published in *Le Monde* newspaper and the series of leaflets the association distributed at this time were the principal means by which SOS-Racisme sought to get this message across. The organisation of a public debate involving many prominent intellectuals was an additional means by which the association sought to inform the public. Running alongside this, the association collected signatures for a petition.

A narrower constituency was targeted in the poster campaign discussed in the final section of the chapter. This addressed Pasqua himself directly and appeared intended primarily to bring pressure to bear on the individual himself, notably from within his own party, to withdraw the proposed

reform. The emphasis here was not so much on the republican tradition but rather the origins and history of Gaullism in France and its current incarnation in the RPR party of which Pasqua was then a prominent member. The poster did not appear intended by the leadership as a tool to mobilise public protest (it did not publicise any specific actions organised by the association) but more as a way of attracting media attention to SOS-Racisme's campaign through generating controversy (and in this it was undoubtedly successful) and bringing pressure to bear directly on Pasqua himself (rather than indirectly through street protest).

In summary, SOS-Racisme's campaign enjoyed both success and failure. On the positive side, its poster attracted media attention and generated a certain amount of controversy which helped to publicise its campaign. More negatively, however, the association's attempt (with others it should be noted) to mobilise 'republican' opinion in street protests against the proposed reforms attracted little public support beyond the ranks of existing activists. A combination of aspects of the 'political opportunity structure' contributed to the relative failure of the demonstrations: the recent change of government and support for Pasqua; the demobilised state of potential allies such as left-wing parties following the election; the uncertainty over the dates of key steps in the political process which made planning demonstrations difficult.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Pasqua Laws contain a reform of the nationality code, a bill relating to identity checks and provisions on immigration control and the conditions of entry and residence of foreigners (see Costa-Lascoux 1994).

<sup>2</sup> 'Tout homme persécuté en raison de son action en faveur de la liberté a droit d'asile sur les territoires de la République.'

<sup>3</sup> 'Derrière la manière feutrée et le discours rassurant sur une simple adaptation juridique rendue nécessaire par l'application des accords de Schengen, c'est bien d'une tentative de rupture dans la tradition républicaine qu'il s'agit.'

<sup>4</sup> As I noticed over two years after completing my fieldwork, the identification sheet lists the name and surname of de Gaulle in the incorrect order. The confusion probably resulted from the fact that the English word 'name' is a faux ami of the French 'nom': the former is often used to refer simply to a person's first name, the latter is only employed in the sense of the English 'surname'.

<sup>5</sup> 'M. Pasqua, heureusement qu'en 1940, des pays respectaient le droit d'asile. Non à la réforme du droit d'asile.'

<sup>6</sup> 'Nous avons tenu à interpeller le ministre de l'intérieur, qui est à l'initiative de cette loi, et à lui rappeler que le gaullisme lui-même est né dans l'exil.'

<sup>7</sup> 'Les gaullistes, mieux que quiconque, savent ce que notre pays doit à la Grande-Bretagne, au courage et à la volonté du peuple anglais pendant la seconde guerre mondiale ... La France comme la Grande-Bretagne ont toujours été, dans l'histoire, à la pointe du combat pour les droits de l'homme et les libertés, et elles y resteront demain.'

<sup>8</sup> This edition of *Le Quotidien de Paris* also carries a commentary by Jean-Richard Sulzer (a professor at the Université Paris-Dauphine) who claims that the poster commits an 'historical error' (*erreur historique*) by representing de Gaulle as a 'simple political refugee' (*un simple réfugié politique*) when in fact he was the head of an exiled government.

<sup>9</sup> 'Les personnages historiques, par le fait même qu'ils appartiennent au patrimoine collectif de la nation, ne sauraient se prêter à une utilisation partisane ... Le général de Gaulle n'ayant jamais-sauf erreur-parlé du droit d'asile, il n'était pas convenable d'invoquer aujourd'hui sa mémoire au soutien d'une thèse dont personne ne peut dire s'il l'aurait critiquée ou défendue.'

<sup>10</sup> Subsequent presidents of the Fifth Republic have also attempted with varying degrees of success to avoid being over-implicated in party politics in order to portray themselves as representatives of the nation as a whole (see Thody 1998; Cole 1998).

<sup>11</sup> I am employing the same terminology here as used by Ramognino (1994) in her analysis of political posters.

## Chapter 10

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# Headscarves, Secularism and Political Change

This final chapter aims to contribute to debates about the 'crisis of anti-racism' in France by comparing the different arguments used and positions adopted by SOS-Racisme during two phases of the so-called headscarves affair (*l'affaire des foulards islamiques*). I examine the interventions made by representatives of SOS-Racisme in the controversy which erupted in 1989 and again in 1994 over whether secularism – widely perceived as an essential feature of the Republican tradition–required the exclusion of young Muslim women wearing the *hidjab* from state schools.

Although the headscarf affair has been the subject of considerable discussion, little to date has been published on the perspectives of members of anti-racist associations such as SOS-Racisme. The following chapter is intended as a contribution towards filling that gap in the literature. (For discussions of other aspects of the 'affair' see, in particular, Beriss 1990; Gaspard and Khosrokhavar 1995; Minces 1996; Monnet 1990.)

## An Overview of the 1989 and 1994 'Headscarf Affairs'

The so-called Islamic headscarves affair began in October 1989 when Ernest Chénier, the headteacher of a state school in Creil (to the north of Paris), suspended three young Muslim students for wearing headscarves. According to Chénier, the young women's insistence on wearing the headscarf to their classes constituted an infringement of the secularism (*laïcité*) of the Republican school, enshrined in French law. The suspension of the three young women was challenged by a number of anti-racist organisations and attracted the attention of the national media. Over the next two months the affair evolved into a 'psychodrama' in which, for many, the national identity of France and the future of Republican values were at stake. Finally, the Education Minister, Lionel Jospin, referred the matter to France's highest administrative court, the Conseil d'Etat, which ruled that wearing a headscarf to school was not in itself an infringement of secularism. Under this ruling, the headscarf could only be prohibited under certain conditions, the most notable of which was its use as an instrument of proselytism (see *Le Monde*, 29 November 1989).

In the public debate over the headscarf SOS-Racisme aligned itself with Jospin in opposing the exclusion of young Muslim women, a position which alienated the association from many of its traditional supporters on the so-called 'secular left (*la gauche laïque*)'. SOS-Racisme argued that the issue should be resolved through negotiation between teachers, parents and the students themselves at a local level and on a case-by-case basis away from the glare of the national media. Harlem Désir, the president of SOS-Racisme, argued repeatedly that his organisation was not in favour of the headscarf – which it viewed as a symbol of women's oppression – but believed that it

was only through their exposure to secular, Republican values at school that young women themselves would decide to stop wearing it.<sup>1</sup>

As Silverman (1992: 112-3) has pointed out, however, the conflict between apparently polarised positions concerning the headscarf should not obscure the existence of an underlying consensus on 'the French model of universalist secularism'. Both SOS-Racisme and Jospin, on the one hand, and their opponents, on the other, shared a fundamental commitment to Republican secularist values; they differed only on the most effective means of promoting these. The dichotomy between universalism/secularism and difference, in terms of which the affair was constructed, remained unchallenged.

The wearing of headscarves in school again became the focus of intensive media interest at a national level in the autumn of 1994, following the publication of an interview in the weekly magazine *Le Point* with the then Education Minister, François Bayrou on 10 September 1994. The contents of this interview were widely reported and discussed in national newspapers over the course of the next week, setting in motion a wider public debate involving teachers, politicians, representatives of religious organisations and human rights/anti-racist activists.

Bayrou's intervention was implicitly critical of the Conseil d'Etat's ruling on 27 November 1989 which had effectively resolved the first phase of the headscarves affair. He claimed that this ruling had subsequently proved difficult to apply in practice and that he had come under pressure from headteachers to clarify the 'uncertain' situation which had resulted. In the magazine interview, Bayrou announced his intention to send a circular to all headteachers in the state sector calling on them to ban the wearing of 'conspicuous (*ostentatoires*)' religious signs by students in their schools.<sup>2</sup>

Crucially, the circular assumed a distinction between 'discrete' and 'conspicuous' religious phenomena, arguing that the latter (in which category Bayrou placed the headscarf) were inherently associated with proselytism and thus a threat to Republican secularism. Although it was argued by some commentators that religious signs by their nature were 'conspicuous', the circular was portrayed by Bayrou as providing headteachers with the clear guidelines they required in order to respond confidently to perceived attacks on the secularism of the Republican school.

The initial reaction of many of the members of SOS-Racisme who assembled in Paris for a meeting of its National Council on 24 September 1994 was to reject Bayrou's circular and reassert the association's 1989 position – opposition to the exclusion of young women wearing the *hidjab*. However, on 13 October 1994 the National Bureau sent a circular to all activists inviting them to a special meeting to debate the issue further. On this occasion a section of the leadership spoke in favour of a modification of the 1989 position to take account of 'developments' in the intervening period. In particular, they claimed that it was no longer a question of a few young women wearing headscarves because of parental pressure, but rather of a concerted attack on Republican secularism by 'Muslim Fundamentalists (*intégristes musulmans*)'. A change in SOS-Racisme's position was also required, they argued, in order to counter the attempt by such 'fundamentalists' to present themselves as the legitimate representatives of all North Africans in France (SOS-Racisme Circular 13 October 1994).

At the end of the meeting a resolution proposed by members of the National Bureau was passed which stated SOS-Racisme's opposition to the wearing of all religious signs in school and called on the French National Assembly to introduce the appropriate legislation.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, the association sought to



distance itself from Bayrou's circular which it described as 'discriminatory (*discriminatoire*)' in that it effectively designated Islam as the sole adversary of Republican secularism. SOS-Racisme's resolution, it was argued, avoided such a scapegoating of immigrants and Muslims in particular by demanding equal juridical treatment for all religions. However, the resolution was also intended to safeguard the secularism of the school from attack by supposed Islamic fundamentalists who, it was claimed, were manipulating the young women wearing the headscarf in order to undermine a central institution of the French state. As an internal circular indicated, the underlying strategy of the association was that of portraying both the 'fundamentalists' and the right-wing government (which had attempted to reduce the funding of state schools relative to the private sector the previous January) as opponents of the Republican school as a tool for the promotion of secularism and equality (SOS-Racisme Circular, 13 October 1994).

## Leadership Action and a Local-Level Debate

In September 1994, the issue of Bayrou's circular and the specific incidents in schools involving young women wearing the headscarf were debated at SOS-Racisme's first National Council meeting after the summer break. Although this did not satisfy all those present, and particularly a number of teachers confronting the issue directly, the association decided to maintain its 1989 position in favour of negotiation and 'dialogue' and against exclusion. However, over the next few weeks the issue continued to be discussed in meetings of the association's National Bureau. A section of the leadership began to argue for a change in the position to take account of 'new' developments. This was reflected in a circular which the National Bureau sent to members:

Since [the last National Council meeting at] the end of September, a new element has emerged: Islamic fundamentalists intend to take advantage of the opportunity offered to them by [Bayrou's] circular by launching an offensive in which they aim to present themselves as the representatives of people of Muslim origins, and particularly North Africans in France. This offensive meets the government's double objective: to place immigrants in the same category as fundamentalists, on the one hand, and to have the immigrant population structured in terms of separate communities, on the other. The logic of the government and of the fundamentalists is opposed to all the values that we defend. One and the other are opponents of integration and equality. (SOS-Racisme Circular, 13 October 1994, one paragraph break omitted)<sup>4</sup>

The circular continued by claiming that:

In such a context, the association finds itself in a difficult situation:

- If we call for the abrogation of the circular and for the girls not to be excluded, we will find ourselves, whether we like it or not, tagging along behind the fundamentalists who have the same demand.
- If we accept exclusion because we want to put an end to the fundamentalists' offensive, we will find ourselves agreeing with a government which persists in raising the anti-immigrant stakes and which points the finger at Islam as the sole adversary of secularism. (SOS-Racisme Circular, 13 October 1994)<sup>5</sup>

As a result of this, the National Bureau proposed to reconvene the National Council in order to debate the issue further and to take account of this altered context. It set a date near the end of October and invited members to attend the meeting in Paris.

In the meantime, the local committee with which I was involved, like others throughout France, discussed the question of the headscarf affair and whether a change in position was needed. As within the National Bureau itself, there were significant differences of perspective on this issue as the following account of the committee meeting I attended illustrates.

This was an evening meeting of the local committee of which I was a member. It was held in central Paris and attended by a dozen activists. One of the points which was discussed was the issue of 'the headscarf' and the circular sent to schools by the Education Minister, François Bayrou. [The following exchanges have been reconstructed from detailed notes I took during the meeting.]

Luc: In 1989, the association had held a National Council meeting where almost unanimously the position had been adopted that the school is the best path to integration for the young girls (*l'école est la meilleure voie d'intégration pour les jeunes filles*) in question and that the situation should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Negotiation rather exclusion. Now members of the association in the provinces are telling us that the SOS's position is not understood (*le discours de SOS n'est pas lisible*) either by students or teachers on the ground. There is also a radicalisation of the young women with respect to four years ago. They are not girls being pressured by their families, but rather young women of 17 or 18 who are militants (*militantes*).

So, certain people in the association are arguing that in several respects the situation is different from in 1989 and that the original position should be changed. There is currently a debate between two positions within the association. The first is that the original position is the right one and we should continue to negotiate and debate in order to integrate the young women. The second is that fundamentalists (*intégristes*) are now using the issue in order to gain ground and we cannot tolerate that (*on ne peut pas tolérer ça*). Those holding this second position argue that all conspicuous (*ostentatoires*) religious signs should be banned. They are calling for a law to this effect.

[After this introduction there was a period of silence.]

Anne [shaking her head from side to side]: It's so hard to adopt a position.

Christophe: In 1989 I was not in favour of excluding the young women. SOS's position seemed to me to be the most 'intelligent' one, in inverted commas, even if the veil (*voile*) was anti-feminist (*anti-féministe*). However, I've since changed my position, for two reasons. Firstly, there is the situation in Algeria and the rise of fundamentalism which threatens people's safety. Secondly, as far as I understand the Qur'an states that Muslims should adapt themselves to the customs of the countries where they are (*les musulmans devaient s'adapter aux coutumes des pays là où ils étaient*). As a

result, my position is that it is necessary to ban the headscarf (*foulard*) completely from schools.

Nicolas: We have to remember that the wearing of the headscarf in schools is not new. That's a first fantasy to destroy. Secondly, there's not a headscarf problem, it's Bayrou's circular which creates the problem. Secularism is not honest (*honnête*) in this respect: there are crosses inside schools and in certain regions of France the Catholic Church inside the school itself is very strong. It's not as simple as it looks. In 1989 I supported SOS's position and I still do. The school is the only possibility which the girls have of integrating (*pour s'intégrer*). That should be remembered. We shouldn't call for a law forbidding all signs. That is the last resort. I'm still in favour of negotiation, I think this would succeed.

Ariane: I feel that the most serious action would be to exclude the young women. In 1989-90 I believed that the headscarves were not a threat to secularism (*les foulards n'étaient pas une menace pour la laïcité*) and that the outcry was a French psychosis (*une psychose française*). What I would like to know is whether a network of fundamentalists does indeed exist? Is there any reality to the reports?

Nicolas: It's not entirely a fantasy, but not all Islamic associations are fundamentalist!

Ariane: What annoys me is that Bayrou pretends to defend secularism when he was responsible for the proposal to reform the Falloux law which would have diverted funds away from state schools. I think that the circular should be seen in the context of the government's measures as a whole, including the Pasqua Laws, which are intended to stigmatise foreigners (*stigmatiser les étrangers*). I'm more in favour of dialogue on a case-by-case basis, although that is perhaps utopian now, as things may have gone too far and a law is needed.

Christophe: Perhaps the circular is intended by the Right to be a way of break secularism definitively (*une manière de casser la laïcité définitivement*), even though it's a fundamental principle of the Republic (*un principe fondamental de la République*). Or perhaps that is too Machiavellian!

[Christophe's suggestion is greeted with some scepticism by those present.]

Nicolas: But part of the Right is against Bayrou's circular too, and there's pressure from the Catholic Church.

Luc: It's clear that the circular resolves nothing. It's also clear that headscarves are appearing not just anywhere but in the estates (*cités*) which have been completely deserted by associations and political parties. The fundamentalists (*intégristes*) are the only ones to try to fill this vacuum (*vide*) and create social links. What I'm afraid of is

that other girls are going to be led to wear headscarves as a result of family pressure or a desire to be like the others. The present case just shows that the fundamentalists are aware of the contradictions which exist and are using them to advance their aims. In my view, if we give in now, the situation will just degenerate. I think the association should adopt a firm and rigid position.

Alain: I feel that we are caught in a trap (*on est dans un piège*), and I'm afraid in case the association does not raise the debate above this trap. I think we're being forced into a position unnecessarily ...

This account of the debate at the local committee meeting highlights some important points. The first of these is the fact that the situation in Algeria (where a number of un-veiled women had recently been murdered) weighed heavily in the analysis of some members, who appeared to fear that the 'contagion' would spread to France. Another issue for members was the nature and extent of the influence of Islamic 'fundamentalists' in French housing estates. Finally, members expressed concern about the possibility that the association was being forced – or trapped – into modifying its position by either the right-wing government or the 'fundamentalists'.

## Tensions and Differences

When the National Council was convened in late October 1994, a lively debate took place between most of the leadership (National Bureau members) and some sections of the membership, on the one hand, and other members, particularly those sympathetic to the Revolutionary Communist

League, who were firmly opposed to any change in the association's position on the issue of the headscarf, on the other. The differences of opinion were so entrenched that in the end the proposition to call for a ban on all religious signs in schools was put to a vote (the only time a vote was held during a National Council meeting during the period of my fieldwork) and passed. Nevertheless, significant differences remained between members on this issue, as I was able to identify when I conducted interviews with a number of grassroots and National Bureau members in the weeks which followed. In the rest of this section, I consider the nature of these differences.

In interviews I asked activists to give their views of SOS-Racisme's apparent change of position on the headscarf issue and on the extent to which there were underlying similarities or continuities. One local activist told me:

Between the position that was taken in 1989 and that which was taken in 1994 there is effectively an evolution, since the 94 position is to call for a law so that in schools all religious signs are banned, of whatever sort they are, whether that be the Christian cross, Jewish kippa or Islamic headscarf. No religious sign must enter. It's the secular school, full stop.

*And did you agree with that change?*

Personally, yes, because from the outset I was in favour of saying that the school was a place where there shouldn't be any sign. Well it's true that there are some signs which are more visible than others, but one cannot say that we'll close our eyes to those which are not visible and forbid those which are visible. Either one disregards them all or one bans them all and I think that a ban is better just the same because that should stay at the school gates. Outside, everyone has the right to dress however and wear whatever they want. But the school is all the same republican and secular. It's one of the great foundation stones of the French Republic and I think that it shouldn't be undermined. (Tape-recorded interview with Marc, 25 November 1994)<sup>6</sup>



This activist argued for a very rigid interpretation of secularism which was not shared by all those I interviewed. Nevertheless, others supported the association's change of position on a number of grounds. One of these was the nature of the situation in the French housing estates. As Nicolas, who radically changed his position between the committee meeting and the time when I interviewed him, stated:

So, SOS's position is to say that it is really necessary to clarify the situation. But we cannot, we will not let ourselves be caught out by these militants because to take the same position as in 1989 is to play into the hands of these Islamic fundamentalists and it is to allow them, to offer them media exposure and it is to allow them to spread a certain number of ideas in that community. (Tape-recorded interview with Nicolas, 17 November 1994)<sup>7</sup>

In a similar way, a member of the association's National Bureau summarised the leadership's (and now the association's official) position as follows:

Now we think that the situation is completely different because we have seen what is happening at Goussainville, at Mantes-la-Jolie and at Lille, which is that many of the young girls who are wearing the headscarf are doing so as militants for fundamentalism. That is to say that behind ... We went to Goussainville. There are organised political groups of fundamentalists ... of Islamic fundamentalists, who are using the young women, either they [the girls] are convinced themselves, or they are manipulated by these political groups but really ... it's really being done in an organised fashion. And we think that these young girls, in any case, even by discussing things with them, that is to say, them being at school, they do more harm at school, they pose a threat to the school and the other young girls than the school could do them good if they were not excluded. (Tape-recorded interview with H  l  ne, 10 November 1994)<sup>8</sup>

For other activists, however, it was 'the Islamic threat' in countries such as Algeria which was a key factor influencing their view:

It seems to me that Islamic threats are stronger, at any rate closer to us. Stronger, no, because ...there had been Iran before, there had been Iran and Iraq, there had been other countries ... But now it's Algeria, it's closer to us geographically. Therefore, people feel more threatened and in the event of a threat, one is sometimes led to abandon a certain tolerance. And as I was against exclusion, notably on the ground that people [i.e. immigrants] must adapt, that they don't want to adapt to everything because that it too much to ask of them, so now I think that it's a defence measure, the defence of our society. Of the secular school in any case. That said I would be favourable to a ban on all religious signs .... (Tape-recorded interview with Christophe, 19 October 1994)<sup>9</sup>

The deteriorating situation in Algeria and an increase in attacks on women appearing in public without the 'veil (*voile*)' preoccupied many other activists and made them more favourable to a ban on all religious signs in France.

Several of those I interviewed, however, expressed more reluctant support for the new position and emphasised the difficulties they had making a decision. Although she agreed with the change, the following member of the National Bureau began in the course of the interview to question whether the association may not have exaggerated, or in her term 'over-estimated', the influence of Islamic 'fundamentalists' in French housing estates:

Me personally, I had real trouble making a decision because it's true that for a few ... Personally, I think that we over-estimated a little but ... It's true that there is a fundamentalist offensive in the suburbs (banlieue) and in schools; that you cannot deny, there's a real change in that respect compared to 1989. But I think that all the same we over-estimated. And that for several dozens of young girls, there are perhaps a few hundred, I don't know, who are really fundamentalists – I think that the majority of young girls who wear the headscarf are not fundamentalists – and that in fact in order to exclude those who are really fundamentalists, everyone is put in the same basket and everyone is excluded. Because you can't make a two-speed law, saying that those women are judged to be

fundamentalists, they are excluded, while for others the headscarf is judged to be more a cultural practice, so they are not excluded. You can't ... A law cannot be made like that. Therefore, from the moment when you can't do that, you are obliged to exclude everyone. And I personally find that very, very difficult to tolerate exclusion on the pretext that it is necessary to exclude certain women who are not necessarily in the majority. I find that it's that which poses the problem. (Tape-recorded interview with Hélène, 10 November 1994)<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, several members of the local committee of which I was a member did not agree with the association's change of position and call for a ban on all religious signs in state schools. In different ways, they considered it either as an admission of failure, or a tactical or political error. This perspective was articulated very forcefully by Alain, the oldest activist in the committee, and someone not affiliated to either the Socialist Party or the Revolutionary Communist League:

I think that the law is not going to resolve a fundamental problem: this is the fact that secular associations, including SOS, are losing ground, that the political field ... the left, the political alternative represented by the left is losing ground ... because it is unable to understand and react in the face of an economic system ... unable effectively to respond to unemployment and so on. The left is incapable of responding to that. Therefore, it is quite normal that the Muslim (*islamistes*) associations which have been making significant progress in the Arab world for the past ten years, end up by taking root in the European Arab world (*dans le monde arabe européen*). Even if the school gates are closed to young girls wearing the veil (*en voile*), that won't prevent, at that same time, the entry of young boys, future *barbus*, who will cause chaos and proselytise. And above all it won't prevent the social organisation, the social development of Islamism. So, in fact, I think that it was good for the association to have had to debate this issue again, to have talked about this affair again. But on the other hand, this matter of the law, that strikes me, really, as yet another example, it's a political failing, a weakness of political thought. (Tape-recorded interview with Alain, 22 November 1994).<sup>11</sup>

For Alain, then, the association's position did not address the underlying issue which was the failure, on the one hand, of previous Socialist governments to tackle rising unemployment in France's peripheral housing estates, and, on the other, of associations such as SOS-Racisme to create some sense of social solidarity in those areas.

For Laurence, a former president of the committee, the issue was more the definition of secularism which informed SOS-Racisme's approach:

I don't agree with the position which says that it is necessary to exclude all religious signs at schools because that is not my vision of secularism. I think that secularism needs to be rethought, and needs to be rethought differently. Between the moment when Jules Ferry gave concrete expression to it on paper and today, I find that there are things to take into the analysis. So I personally was not in agreement with this position. [...] I'm not saying that they must never be excluded. One can come to, be brought to exclude them but for me that is a pedagogical failure. Exclusion is always a failure. (Tape-recorded interview with Laurence, 7 December 1994)<sup>12</sup>

She emphasised that her own position on the subject of the headscarf had not altered:

Personally, on the position about the headscarf in 94, I haven't changed my position since 89. I think exactly the same things, I'm even more confirmed in my position. I think that the facts have shown that it is through the school that young girls remove the headscarf. I don't want to minimise the role of fundamentalism in this country and the importance which the headscarf may have acquired in certain places [...]. But with respect to SOS-Racisme's change of position, I think that they made an error in their analysis – and that is what I said to them – and they are getting caught in the fundamentalists' trap in my opinion. For me ... I didn't understand why the others have changed position. (Tape-recorded interview with Laurence, 7 December 1994)<sup>13</sup>

Alain, however, had a very simple explanation of the events which had just taken place within the association. He raised the issue of the role which Julien Dray, one of the association's founder members and a Socialist Party deputy since 1988, continued to play within it. He suggested that:

There are coup d'état attempts by Julien Dray [...]. That is to say that if you hang around a bit at SOS, you get to learn that 'Julien', in inverted commas, 'Julien' has been past and that 'he wants ... he says ...it is necessary that ...' As far as the Tapie affair was concerned, I didn't really understand where he situated himself. At any rate, with the headscarf affair, I understood where he situated himself. That is to say that the National Council met and said: We adopt the same position as in 89. Then we learn that Julien thinks that 'it's not the same, we need to see' and so on. And off we go! The National Council is reconvened ...

*So you think that he ...?*

He induced that, he convinced a certain number of people and I think that there are members ... certain members of the National Bureau do not agree but since Julien said it, it has to be done. (Tape-recorded interview with Alain, 22 November 1994)<sup>14</sup>

This raises questions about the association's independence and leadership, similar to those considered in the last chapter. To what extent is the association's elected leadership an independent force or instead heavily influenced by Dray and others in the Socialist Party (as SOS-Racisme's critics have often alleged)?

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to reveal some of the tensions which existed underneath the official declaration of SOS-Racisme's change of position on the issue of the headscarf which was released to the press in October 1994. It has highlighted a range of perspectives, from a fairly hard-line, even intolerant version of republican secularism, to a more flexible, open approach. What was common, however, to all the activists in SOS-Racisme I interviewed, or with whom I discussed the issue in other contexts, was an opposition to the headscarf itself. As one activist emphasised to me: 'We have never been in favour of the wearing of the headscarf, we have always been in favour of not excluding the young girls .... That is the association's position.' (Tape-recorded interview with H  l  ne, 10 November 1994)<sup>15</sup> Beneath the apparent abandonment of the 1989 position, therefore, were important continuities. In particular, there was a failure to consider the headscarf as anything other than a symbol of women's oppression.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Je suis, moi, persuadé que c'est au sein de l'école publique que ces jeunes filles s'émanciperont. Dans le cadre de l'école publique, par l'accès aux connaissances, par la confrontation avec un autre univers que l'univers familial, par l'esprit sceptique qu'elles y acquerront, ces adolescentes ont des chances d'échapper à l'obscurantisme.' (Harlem Désir, in *Libération* 21 October 1989)

<sup>2</sup> 'Nous pouvons accepter à l'école des signes religieux discrets, cela s'est toujours fait. Pas de signes si ostentatoires qu'ils séparent les jeunes entre eux.' (*Le Monde* 11-12 September 1994) ['We can allow discrete religious signs in school, that's always happened. Not religious signs which are so conspicuous that they separate young people from each other.']

<sup>3</sup> 'SOS Racisme s'exprime donc clairement contre le port de tout signe religieux dans les écoles et pour qu'une loi soit votée en ce sens à l'Assemblée nationale.' (Resolution of the National Council of SOS Racisme, 22 October 1994)

<sup>4</sup> 'Cependant, depuis fin septembre, un élément nouveau est apparu: les intégristes musulmans veulent profiter de l'occasion qui leur est offerte par cette circulaire pour lancer une offensive qui vise à se présenter comme les représentants des personnes d'origines musulmanes, et singulièrement des maghrébins en France. Cette offensive satisfait le double objectif du gouvernement : assimiler les immigrés aux intégristes d'une part, et avoir une structuration de l'immigration par communautés séparées d'autre part. La logique du gouvernement et des intégristes va l'encontre de toutes les valeurs que nous défendons. L'un comme l'autre sont des adversaires de l'intégration et de l'égalité.'

<sup>5</sup> 'Dans un tel contexte, l'association se retrouve dans une situation difficile:

'- Si nous demandons l'abrogation de la circulaire et que les filles ne soient pas exclues, nous nous retrouvons, qu'on le veuille ou non, à la remorque des intégristes qui ont la même revendication.

'- Si nous acceptons l'exclusion parce que nous voulons mettre un terme à l'offensive des intégristes, nous nous retrouvons en accord avec un gouvernement qui ne cesse de faire de la surenchère anti-immigrés et qui montre du doigt l'Isam comme seul adversaire de la laïcité.'

<sup>6</sup> 'Entre la position qui a été prise en l'année 89 et celle qui a été prise en 94 il y a eu effectivement une évolution, puisque la position de 94 est pour demander une loi afin que dans les écoles tous les signes religieux soient interdits quels qu'ils soient, que ça soit la croix chrétienne, la kippa juive ou le foulard islamique, aucun signe de religion doit rentrer c'est l'école laïque point.

*'Et est-ce que tu es en accord avec ce changement-là?*

'Moi, oui parce que moi j'étais dès le départ pour dire que l'école c'est un lieu où il y aurait à avoir aucun signe . Enfin c'est vrai qu'il y a des signes qui sont plus visibles que d'autres mais bon on ne peut pas dire à ceux qui sont pas visibles on ferme les yeux et ceux qui sont visibles on les interdit. Alors ou on ferme à tout le monde ou on interdit et je pense que l'interdiction est mieux quand même parce que bon ça doit rester à la porte de l'école. Après, en dehors chacun a le droit de s'habiller, de porter ce qu'il veut. Mais c'est quand même l'école républicaine et laïque et ça c'est un des grands fondements de la République française et on pense qu'on ne doit pas y porter atteinte.'

<sup>7</sup> 'Donc, la position de SOS c'est de dire il faut vraiment clarifier la situation et mais on ne peut pas, on ne veut pas se laisser piéger par ces militants parce que prendre la même position qu'en '89 c'est de faire le jeu de ces militants islamistes et c'est de leur permettre justement, c'est leur offrir une vitrine médiatique et c'est leur permettre de faire passer auprès de la communauté un certain nombre d'idées.'

<sup>8</sup> 'Maintenant on pense que la situation est complètement différente parce que ce qu'on a vu, ce qui se passait à Goussainville, à Mantes la Jolie et à Lille, c'est que les jeunes filles qui portent le voile, elles le font beaucoup plus par militantisme intégriste. C'est à dire que derrière...On est allé à Goussainville, il y a des groupes politiques organisés, d'intégristes...d'intégristes musulmans, fondamentalistes, qui instrumentalisaient les jeunes filles, soit elles sont convaincues, soit elles sont manipulées par ces groupes politiques mais vraiment...c'est vraiment de façon organisée. Et on pense que ces jeunes filles, de toute façon, même en discutant avec elles, c'est à dire qu'en étant à l'école, elles font plus de mal à l'école, elles menacent plus l'école et les autres jeunes filles que l'école ne pourrait leur faire du bien si on ne les excluait pas.'

<sup>9</sup> 'Il me semble que les menaces islamistes sont plus fortes, en tout cas plus proches de nous, plus fortes non parce que ... il y avait eu l'Iran avant, il y avait eu l'Iran et l'Iraq, il y avait eu d'autres pays...Mais maintenant c'est l'Algérie c'est plus proche de nous géographiquement. Donc on se sent plus menacé et en cas de menace parfois il y a une certaine tolérance qu'on est amené à abandonner. Et autant j'étais totalement contre l'exclusion,

notamment pour ce principe que on peut...que des gens doivent s'adapter, qu'ils ne veulent s'adapter à tout parce que c'est trop leur demander. Autant maintenant je me dis que c'est une mesure de défense, de défense, de défense de notre société. De l'école laïque en tout cas. Cela dit, je serais même favorable à ce qu'on banisse tout signe religieux....'

<sup>10</sup> 'Moi, je suis ...moi, j'ai eu vraiment du mal à trancher parce que c'est vrai que pour quelques ...moi, je pense qu'on a un petit peu surestimé...autant que c'est vrai qu'il y a une offensive de l'intégrisme dans les banlieues et à l'école, ça on ne peut pas le nier, par rapport à 89, il y a un vrai changement par rapport à ça; mais je pense que même si ce phénomène existe et va en croissant-je pense qu'on a quand même surestimé et que pour quelques dizaines de jeunes filles, on a peut être quelques centaines j'en sais rien, qui sont vraiment intégristes, je pense que la majorité des jeunes filles qui portent le foulard n'est pas intégristes et que de fait, pour exclure celles qui sont vraiment intégristes, du coup on met toutes les autres dans le wagon et on exclut tout le monde parce qu'on ne peut pas faire une loi à deux vitesses en disant celles-là on juge qu'elles sont plutôt intégristes, on les exclut, celles-là on juge que c'est plutôt culturel, donc on ne les exclut pas. On ne peut pas...une loi ne peut pas faire ça. Donc à partir du moment où on ne peut pas faire ça on est obligé d'exclure tout le monde, moi je trouve que c'est très très difficilement tolérable d'exclure sous prétexte qu'il faut exclure certaines qui ne sont pas forcément la majorité. Je trouve que c'est ça qui pose le problème.'

<sup>11</sup>Je pense que la loi ne va pas régler un problème de fond: c'est que les associations laïques, y compris SOS, sont en recul, que le champ politique ...la gauche, l'alternative politique de la gauche est en recul...parce qu'elle a une incapacité de comprendre et de réagir face à une organisation économique ...Donc, effectivement de répondre au chômage et tout ça. Donc, ça, la gauche est incapable de réagir face à ça. Donc, effectivement, c'est normal que les associations islamistes qui sont en pleine progression depuis dix ans dans le monde arabe finissent par s'implanter dans le monde arabe européen ...et que ...On peut toujours interdire les portes des écoles aux jeunes filles en voile par une loi, on empêchera pas à ce moment-là, l'entrée des jeunes garçons, futurs barbus, qui viendront semer la merde, et feront du prosélytisme. Et puis on empêchera surtout pas, c'est qu'on n'empêchera pas l'organisation sociale, le développement social, d'un développement islamiste. Bon. Donc, en fait, cette affaire, je trouve que ce qui y était bien pour l'association c'est d'avoir redébatu de ça, c'est d'en avoir reparlé, donc, de cette affaire. Et aussi je pense que l'esprit de tout le monde ...Tout le monde a compris des trucs, a analysé des trucs un peu différemment. Mais par contre, l'histoire de la loi, ça me semble, alors

vraiment, encore une truc, c'est une faiblesse politique quoi, une faiblesse de pensée politique.

<sup>12</sup> Je suis pas d'accord avec la position qui dit qu'il faut exclure tous les signes religieux à l'école parce que ce n'est pas ma vision de la laïcité. Je crois que la laïcité doit être repensée et doit être pensée différemment. Entre le moment où Jules Ferry l'a concrétisée sur le papier et aujourd'hui je trouve qu'il y a des choses à intégrer dans l'analyse. Donc moi je suis pas d'accord avec cette proposition. [...] Et je dis pas qu'il faut jamais les exclure. On peut arriver, être amené à les exclure mais pour moi c'est un échec pédagogique, l'exclusion c'est toujours un échec.

<sup>13</sup> 'Moi, je...sur la position du foulard en 94, moi je n'ai pas changé de position depuis 89 donc je pense exactement les mêmes choses, même encore plus renforcées. Et je crois que justement les faits nous ont montrés que c'est par l'école que les jeunes filles enlèvent le foulard. Et je ne veux pas minimiser le rôle de l'intégrisme dans ce pays et l'importance que le foulard peut avoir pris dans certains endroits. [...] Par rapport au changement de position de SOS-Racisme, je pense qu'ils ont fait une erreur d'analyse et c'est ce que je leur ai dit et ils fonctionnent dans le piège intégriste à mon avis. Pour moi...Je n'ai pas compris pourquoi les autres avaient changé de position.'

<sup>14</sup> 'Il y a des tentatives de coup d'état de Julien Dray [...]. C'est à dire que quand tu traines un peu à SOS, t'apprends comme ça que 'Julien' entre guillemets, 'Julien' est passé et qu'il voudrait que ... il a dit que ... il faut que ... Sur l'affaire Tapie, je n'ai pas bien compris où il se situait. En tout cas, sur l'affaire du foulard, j'ai compris où il situait. C'est à dire que le Conseil national s'est réuni et dit: On adopte la même position qu'en 89. Et puis on apprend que Julien pense que c'est pas pareil, il faut voir, et tout ça. Et hop! Reconvocation du Conseil national avec ...

*'Donc tu penses que c'était lui ... ?*

'C'est lui qui a induit ça, qui a convaincu un certain nombre de gens et je pense qu'il y a des membres ... certains membres du Bureau national qui ne sont pas d'accord mais comme Julien l'a dit il faut y aller quoi.'

<sup>15</sup> 'On n'a jamais été pour la porte du foulard, on a toujours été pour essayer de ne pas exclure les jeunes filles...et donc ça c'est la position de l'association.'

# Chapter 11

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## Conclusion

It is now six years since I stood in the Elysée-Montmartre concert hall in central Paris watching the tenth birthday celebrations of the anti-racist association SOS-Racisme. Important aspects of the political context – and opportunity structure – for anti-racist action in France have changed in the intervening period. Twelve months after walking slowly and painfully onto the stage to cut SOS-Racisme's birthday cake in December 1994, François Mitterrand died of cancer. The 1995 presidential election was won by the right-wing candidate, Jacques Chirac, although by an unexpectedly narrow margin. Two years after that, one of the Socialist Party politicians I had seen mingling with other guests in the hall of the Elysée-Montmartre, Lionel Jospin, became Prime Minister at the head of a left-wing coalition government.

There have also been significant changes within SOS-Racisme during this time. The success of the National Front at the 1995 municipal elections prompted the association to campaign more directly against Le Pen's party. The association's credibility in the eyes of many sections of the anti-racist movement was, however, damaged by its conditional (or, some would claim, half-hearted) support for the action of the *sans-papiers* – undocumented resident foreigners – from 1996 onwards (see Alaux 1996; Abdallah 2000). In the spring of 1999, its president, Fodé Sylla, resigned in order to stand as a



Communist Party candidate in the forthcoming European elections. He was replaced by a former vice-president of the association, Malek Boutih, the first person of North African origin to hold that office. At a local level, the committee with which I was involved for eighteen months still exists, but many of those I knew are no longer active within it. Some have moved away from Paris, while others have chosen to concentrate on political party activism instead.

Nevertheless, certain continuities exist, as the photograph reproduced as Figure 11 illustrates. Taken during the 1998 May-Day demonstration in Paris, this image draws attention to several points which I have discussed over the course of this thesis. On the one hand, the slogan on the placard in the top left-hand corner – 'Le Pen, Hands off the Republic! (*Le Pen, Touche pas à la République*)' – highlights the way in which the association continues to portray itself as a defender of republican values and institutions. On the other, the juxtaposition of the stickers which the young women pictured in the foreground have on their clothes and the placards they are holding symbolises the ongoing links between SOS-Racisme and other types of organisation in its 'nebula', in this case the secondary school students' federation, the FIDL.

More significantly, SOS-Racisme (and, to a certain extent, the anti-racist movement as a whole) is still confronted with a number of the strategic and ideological choices or dilemmas analysed in this thesis. The aim of the present, concluding chapter is to review these challenges facing SOS-Racisme at the start of the twenty-first century. This chapter will also summarise the arguments which the thesis has advanced in favour of an ethnographic approach to social movements and their constituent organisations.





Figure 11 Anti-Racist Demonstrators in Paris, 1 May 1998 (Photo: J. Hurd)

## Politics, Anti-Racism and Republicanism in France

The events discussed in this thesis occurred against the background of growing public debate, and controversy, about a 'crisis' of anti-racism in contemporary France. In such a context, as the sociologist Michel Wieviorka has argued:

the role of the social sciences is most certainly not to judge the issue too quickly, to take a stand in activist fashion. It is much more to clarify the debate and, as a result, to transform into an object of analysis that which is still above all a stake in ideological and political conflicts with strong echoes in the media. Anti-racism is an action, a set of practices and discourses, and deserves to be studied as such ... . (Wieviorka 1993c: 417).<sup>1</sup>

Since its creation in 1984, SOS-Racisme has been at the heart of this controversy, and has been heavily criticised by journalists, other anti-racist activists, and academics (most notably, the political philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff). In line with Wieviorka's recommendation, however, this thesis has attempted to provide a detailed, sociological analysis of both the 'discourse' and (especially) the practice of SOS-Racisme as an anti-racist campaigning association over an eighteen-month period in the mid-1990s. In so doing, it has highlighted the partial, out-dated or even distorted image of the association which has frequently underpinned journalistic and academic critiques.

Nevertheless, it has also identified a number of unresolved issues or weaknesses which continue to undermine the effectiveness of SOS-Racisme's action against racism, discrimination and inequality in France. These can be grouped together under the following headings: identity, difference, and autonomy and mediation.

## *Identity*

A first tension is between two of the activities which SOS-Racisme's National Bureau identified, in a discussion document circulated at the 1993 Congress, as being essential to the association's future development (see SOS-Racisme 1993b). These were: on the one hand, local-level activism to ensure the association's 'implantation' in the social fabric; and, on the other, high-profile national campaigns to influence public opinion (*campagnes d'opinion*). The issue is the extent to which the association and its members have not only the resources (in terms of time, numbers of activists and funding) but also a commitment to pursue these two objectives simultaneously.

As I have shown, there is effectively a structural barrier to the achievement of both aims in the case of the association's Parisian committees. The Paris-based National Bureau, which has primary responsibility for co-ordinating national campaigns, is composed of only twenty or so members, many of whom are also active in local committees located in and around the capital. In order to conduct national campaigns, the leadership is thus dependent on local activists in Paris to distribute leaflets, put up posters, collect signatures for petitions and represent the association at demonstrations. Almost inevitably, this leads to local-level initiatives being marginalised, simply because the activists concerned have a finite amount of time and energy to put into the association.

However, the issue is not simply one of limited resources. The nature and identity of SOS-Racisme itself is also at stake here. At the July 1993 Congress, the leadership obviously intended that SOS-Racisme should remain an association which was not only committed to campaigning on national issues through the use of posters, petitions and demonstrations to attract media

and public attention, but also engaged at a local-level in a daily struggle against specific instances of racism, inequality and discrimination through the action of its local committees. Nevertheless, it is clear that among the membership, and to a certain extent the leadership too, there was a view that priority should be given to one or the other of these two orientations.

This reflected opposing underlying conceptions of the association's nature and role. On the one hand were those who considered SOS-Racisme to be primarily an instrument for informing and influencing public opinion on questions of immigration and racism. The association was regarded essentially as 'a vector for public opinion (*un vecteur d'opinion*)', in the phrase of the activist I quoted in Chapter 2. On the other hand, however, there were members who emphasised above all the importance of creating strong local links and orienting the association's activity more towards the grassroots level. One example of this was the repeated calls made by one member of the committee of which I was a member for the group to take up local issues and seek to raise its profile and attract support locally.

The origins of this tension between an emphasis on local action or alternatively on national campaigns can be traced back to the nature of SOS-Racisme's emergence in the mid-1980s. The association achieved national prominence, through press interviews and the organisation of a series of initiatives including the free concert in June 1985, before it had a membership base and structure of grassroots committees. It was only later that the association began to attach importance to 'a local-level anti-racism (*un antiracisme de proximité*)' (interview with Harlem Désir in *Le Monde*, 18 June 1988). The issue of the relative weight to be given to the type of national, high-profile events on which SOS-Racisme's early reputation was based, as opposed to more specific, local initiatives necessary to ensure a

measure of credibility and its future expansion, is part of the legacy of that initial period which continued to pose problems for the association in the mid-1990s.

### *Difference*

A second tension which I have identified in the 'discourse' and practice of SOS-Racisme, and it is one which poses a challenge for the anti-racist movement in France as a whole, is between, on the one hand, a recognition of ethnic and cultural differences and, on the other, a commitment to a universalist or 'Republican' conception of individual integration into the nation-state. This is a point which has been made in general terms by the sociologist Michel Wieviorka:

There is a structural problem which constantly undermines anti-racist action, and which its protagonists are not always capable of formulating correctly. I refer to the opposition between the contradictory universalist and the differentialist orientations of anti-racist action which are difficult, and perhaps even impossible, to overcome. (1997b: 147)

This is one of the most difficult issues for anti-racism in contemporary France and elsewhere. As Wieviorka again has pointed out:

[A]nti-racism has no choice. It has to navigate between the Scylla of universalism and the Charybdis of differentialism, and to encourage the continual and pragmatic search for an articulation of the two registers. [...] anti-racism can avoid defeat (which a liberal train of thought would refer to as the opposite) only by taking as its target the refusal of anything which separates or opposes the universal values of law and reason to the specific values of a given culture. (1997b: 149)

In various chapters of this thesis, I have examined the way in which SOS-Racisme has attempted to reconcile 'universalism' and 'difference' through the concept of integration, defined as a dynamic, reciprocal process. However, I have also emphasised the problematic nature of this concept, in



contrast to most mainstream French academics and other commentators (such as Taguieff, although not Wieviorka). The position which SOS-Racisme adopted during the 1994 'Islamic headscarf affair', as discussed in Chapter 10, highlighted many of the difficulties associated with the integration concept and its potentially assimilationist and exclusionary nature. Finding a more appropriate way of articulating a commitment to universalism with some recognition of difference remains a key task not only for SOS-Racisme but also the anti-racist movement in France more generally.

### *Autonomy and Mediation*

The final issue which SOS-Racisme confronted in the mid-1990s and which continues to face the anti-racist and other social movements in France today is the need to balance political autonomy and mediation. Writing in the early 1980s, the Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci claimed that one of the distinguishing features of contemporary forms of collective action was its 'refusal to accept any political mediation' (1980: 220). In his view, this constituted a significant problem for the effectiveness and the development of such action. Arguing that the relationship between social movements and political parties was 'the central knot for any project of social transformation', he stated that:

[social movements] require political mediation and can only survive if the demands they carry are interpreted and mediated by the political system. Such a mediation cannot, however, absorb the entire charge of the demands, which express themselves through collective action. The movement continues to exist beyond its political mediation. (Melucci 1981: 190-1.)

According to Melucci, it is crucial for the future of a democratic society not only that political parties prove capable of mediating and representing the interests and demands of social movements, but also that these movements



are able to retain an autonomous existence. In other words, there is a need for 'the dualism between power and collective demands' to be maintained (1981: 191).

Striking an effective balance between autonomy and mediation is one of the most important challenges which social movements and their constituent organisations have to confront. The case of SOS-Racisme, as one of the most prominent organisations within the anti-racist movement, is revealing in this respect. The association's independence (or otherwise) from political parties, notably the Socialist Party, has been a highly controversial issue ever since its creation in 1984, both for its members and other sections of the anti-racist movement, as well as for academic commentators and journalists. This thesis has revealed that in the mid-1990s the association was still seeking an acceptable way of advancing its ideas and policy proposals through co-operation with political parties, without sacrificing its autonomy in the process.

The controversial politician and businessman Bernard Tapie's invitation to the then president of SOS-Racisme, Fodé Sylla, to stand as a candidate on his list for the 1994 European elections highlighted this. As I explained in Chapter 8, a section of the leadership was very attracted to this idea as a means of securing 'a political outlet (*un débouché politique*)' for the association's ideas and of increasing its influence. However, they came up against the determined opposition of many grassroots activists who considered that such a course of action would undermine the association's credibility and put its political independence into question. Nevertheless, as I indicated in Chapter 9, in the absence of support from left-wing parties, SOS-Racisme was unable to mount an effective campaign against a reform of asylum rights in the autumn of 1993. This only served to highlight further

the continuing need for the association to find a means of reconciling the twin imperatives of autonomy and mediation.

## Ethnography, Social Movements and Anthropology

On a more general level, finally, I have pursued two main objectives in this thesis. Firstly, I have sought, through a detailed study of the French anti-racist association SOS-Racisme, to contribute towards the development of an anthropology of social movements, as an alternative to the current 'invisibility' (to borrow Escobar's word again) within the discipline of such forms of collective action. Secondly, I have endeavoured to demonstrate the importance of an ethnographic approach, involving long-term participant observation, to social movements and their constituent organisations. In so doing, however, I have confronted the same 'double challenge (*double défi*)' which Abélès and Rogers have suggested is encountered by anthropologists who choose to conduct fieldwork 'at home':

They need to demonstrate the efficacy of [their] approach, sometimes in the face of the scepticism of neighbouring disciplines which have up until that point 'occupied the field'. Furthermore, the development of an anthropology of the near makes an in-depth reflection on field-sites and methods, a significant revision of concepts even, increasingly indispensable. (Abélès and Rogers 1992: 7)<sup>2</sup>

The present thesis has attempted to respond to both of these challenges. On the one hand, I have developed an argument in support of increased use of participant observation, as part of a more general ethnographic approach, in social movements research. In contrast to scholars such as Touraine, I have claimed, and sought to illustrate in various chapters of the thesis, that participant observation is a highly effective tool for generating insights into processes of collective identity construction. On the other, I have argued that

the emergence of an anthropology of social movements in this country requires a re-examination of the conceptual and theoretical weaknesses of post-war political anthropology. Key concepts in current social movements research – political opportunity structure, collective identity and social movement (organisation) – I have proposed, are valuable resources for a political anthropology committed to understanding aspects of contemporary mass politics. In addition to the more specific points about the relationship between politics, anti-racism and republicanism in France summarised earlier in this conclusion, these are the two more general arguments which the various chapters of this thesis have sought to make.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'Dans une telle situation, le rôle des sciences sociales n'est assurément pas de trancher trop vite, de s'engager sur un mode militant. Il est bien davantage d'éclairer le débat et, par conséquent, de transformer en objet d'analyse ce qui est encore avant tout l'enjeu de conflits idéologico-politiques à fortes résonances médiatiques. L'antiracisme est une action, un ensemble de pratiques et de discours, qui mérite d'être étudiée à ce titre ....'

<sup>2</sup> 'Il leut faut en effet démontrer l'efficacité de cette approche en se heurtant parfois au scepticisme des disciplines voisines qui ont jusqu'ici «occupé le terrain». En outre, le développement d'une anthropologie du proche rend de plus en plus indispensable une réflexion en profondeur sur les terrains et les méthodes, voire des remaniements conceptuels conséquents.'

# Appendix 1

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## List of Archives and Dossiers Consulted

### 1. Resource Centres

Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris

Bibliothèque de l'Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris

Bibliothèque nationale, Paris

Centre d'Information et d'Études sur les Migrations Internationales, Paris

SOS-Racisme, National Bureau Archives

### 2. Press Archives

Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris

Centre de documentation sur la presse: coupures de presse

(a) 141/085: SOS-Racisme

Tome 1: 20/2/85 - 31/12/85

Tome 2: 1/1/86 - 27/3/90

Tome 3: 28/3/90 -

(b) 302/5: Enseignement Privé-Laïcité

Tome 20: 1/10/89 - 1/90 (Affaire du foulard islamique)

## Appendix 2

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### List of Individuals and Organisations Interviewed

#### (A) SOS-Racisme

'Alain': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	22/11/94
'Ariane': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	3/12/94
'Christophe': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	19/10/94
'Claude': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	11/12/94
'Didier': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	28/11/94
'François': member of Comité Stop-Racisme Z (Paris)	2/10/94
'Hélène': member of National Bureau (Paris)	10/11/94
'Juliette': member of Legal Commission (Paris)	18/11/94
'Laurence': member of Comité Stop-Racisme Q (Paris) [former member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)]	7/12/94
'Luc': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	3/10/94
'Marc': member of Comité Stop-Racisme Y (Paris)	25/11/94
'Nicolas': member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	17/11/94
'Pascale': member of National Bureau and member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	24/11/94
'Patricia': member of National Bureau and member of Comité Stop-Racisme X (Paris)	18/10/94, 10/11/94

The first names of SOS-Racisme activists who agreed to be interviewed have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity.



### (B) Other Organisations

CAIF (Conseil des associations immigrées en France)	5/12/94
CIMADE (Comité inter-mouvements auprès des évacués)	6/8/93
CNCDP (Comité national contre la double peine): Nordine IZNASNI and two other members	8/12/94
LDH (Ligue des droits de l'homme)	6/8/93
MRAP (Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples): Alain CALLES, Assistant General Secretary	5/12/94
MRAP (Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples): Albert LEVY, former General Secretary	17/11/94

### (C) Additional Interviews

FARINE, Philippe: Municipal Councillor (PS), Paris and 6/12/94  
Member of Haut conseil à l'intégration (HCI)

NB: All interviews were conducted in Paris and, with the exception of those with representatives of the CIMADE and LDH, were tape-recorded.

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